



DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

AN ROINN OIDEACHAIS  
MÄNNYSTRIE O LEAR



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

# RESEARCH BRIEFING

ISSN 1366-803X

RB 2/2001

December 2001

## ASSESSMENT OF THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE YOUTH SERVICE COMMUNITY RELATIONS SUPPORT SCHEME (YSCRSS) DURING 1998/1999 AND 1999/2000, IN RELATION TO THE NEEDS OF YOUTH AND COMMUNITY GROUPS

### KEY FINDINGS

- ❖ The Scheme is reaching a substantial number of young people from all over Northern Ireland, covering a wide age range and an even mix of religious backgrounds.
- ❖ Programmes cover an extremely varied range of activities with the most popular level of programme focusing on Contact Level 1 and preparatory work.
- ❖ Youth Officers regard the Scheme as worthwhile, providing an extremely useful framework in which to facilitate community relations work amongst young people.
- ❖ In general, participants appear to receive the support they need, and believe that their programmes are successful in achieving their aims and objectives.
- ❖ Those involved in running the Scheme believe its key strengths rest in its ability to fund community relations work, and the 'on hand' support of the local Youth Officers.

- ❖ The majority of participants stated that they would participate on the programme again, and most stated that they had learned more about their own and others' religions, cultures and traditions through the range of activities offered by the programme.
- ❖ Key perceived weaknesses of the scheme are the limited level of funding available and the bureaucracy involved.

## INTRODUCTION

1. The Youth Service Community Relations Support Scheme (YSCRSS) is funded by the Department of Education (DE), and is used to reinforce and develop one of the key principles of the Youth Service of promoting a 'greater understanding of a society with diverse traditions'. Building on the fundamental principle of 'the promotion of acceptance and understanding of others', the YSCRSS is aimed specifically at providing practical opportunities for young people to gain a greater understanding of the main cultural traditions in Northern Ireland, enabling them to contribute positively to the development of community relations.

2. Currently the YSCRSS incorporates four main strands as outlined below:

### ❖ **Preparatory Work**

This involves introducing young people to the concept of community relations, providing them with the opportunity in a non-threatening environment to share and explore their own cultural identity in preparation for contact and interaction with groups from different cultural/religious traditions.

### ❖ **Cross Community Contact**

This strand takes into consideration that individuals and groups engage in community relations work at varying levels and therefore it is subdivided into three stages:

Level 1 - Foundation Work;

Level 2 - Issue Work; and

Level 3 - Conflict Resolution.

The content of and expected outcomes from each of these levels are designed to progress the young people from meeting and working with one another in a non-threatening environment to meeting and discussing more sensitive areas such as history, religion, politics and cultural traditions.

### ❖ **Leadership Training Opportunities**

Appropriate training is offered on an annual basis in each Education and Library Board (ELB) area as, due to the specialist nature of community relations work, training is considered both necessary and desirable in the successful implementation of community relations programmes.

## ❖ Bursary Awards

A number of bursaries are available to individual young people (aged 16-25) who wish to enhance their knowledge and skills in the area of community relations work by attending conferences, taking study visits etc.

3. All groups working specifically with young people - both youth organisations registered with the Youth Section of their relevant ELB as well as other community or interest groups focusing on young people - can apply for funding under YSCRSS.

4. From September 1992 responsibility for the management and development of the YSCRSS has been devolved to the Youth Sections of the ELBs from DE. From September 1996 Boards assumed responsibility for community and sports groups. During this time there have been a number of successful developments implemented including training for youth workers and field support for units involved in cross community work.

5. It is against this background that DE commissioned research into the effectiveness of cross community work for young people and to consider the quality and quantity of opportunities as well as the strengths and weaknesses of current provision.

## **MAIN FINDINGS**

6. This research indicates that the Scheme is reaching a substantial number of young people from all over Northern Ireland covering a wide age range and an even mix of Roman Catholics and Protestants. 806 programmes were organised over the two years with over 41,000 participants involved. Programmes covered an extremely varied range of activities with the most popular level of programme focusing on Contact Level 1 and preparatory work. Over half of the groups using the YSCRSS between 1998-2000 were registered with their respective ELB with the majority having received funding previously. Of those groups where information was available, one in four groups received additional funding from other sources.

7. All Youth Officers agree that the YSCRSS is a worthwhile scheme providing an extremely useful framework in which to facilitate community relations work amongst young people. Weaknesses were seen in the level of administration required in managing the Scheme and the amount of funding. Opportunities for the development of the YSCRSS were seen in adopting a more structured approach with standard criteria for assessment of applications, the increased promotion of the Scheme and the encouragement of progression through the various contact levels.

8. The Scheme appears to be reaching a range of types of groups, many of whom have been receiving funding for two years or more. In general, groups appear to receive the type of support they require and believe that their programmes are successful or very successful in achieving their aims and objectives.

9. Those involved in running programmes generally found the processes involved in YSCRSS to be good or very good and believed the key strengths of the Scheme rested in its ability to fund community relations work as well as the 'on hand' support of the local Youth Officers. The level of funding was considered to be a key weakness and one in five believed the YSCRSS to be too bureaucratic. In general it was recognised that the Scheme does provide a good structure for facilitating community relations work but concerns were raised over the lack of staffing, the need for more practical, user-friendly training, the difficulties in evaluating programmes and various funding issues.

10. The vast majority of young people stated that they would participate on the programme again. Over 70% of respondents learned more about their own and others' religions, cultures and traditions through a range of activities. Regarding the future development of YSCRSS the young people believed that more support should come from schools, parents etc. and that there should be a feedback mechanism in place for participants.

## CONCLUSIONS

11. The YSCRSS appears to be providing significant numbers of young people with practical opportunities of gaining a greater understanding of the main cultural traditions in Northern Ireland. The enthusiasm of responses and their positive nature from the majority of young participants indicates that they will contribute positively to the development of community relations.

12. The strengths of current practice lie in the commitment and support provided by the YSCRSS, the Youth Officers and the leaders of the various organisations themselves. Flexibility, close co-operation with young people, good preparation and carefully selected activities appear to be key factors in successful programmes. Weaknesses perhaps lie in the lack of access to up-to-date, practical training and information as well as a certain reluctance on the part of some groups (perhaps due to time restraints) to evaluate any work being carried out.

13. The guidelines which exist for the YSCRSS appear to be appropriate and relevant as a working document for the work involved, but serve more as a useful backup support for the more important support of field staff themselves. Those who

recognise the importance of evaluating programmes perceive it as difficult due to the attitudinal nature of community relations work.

14. Whilst it was recognised that funding is limited, concerns were also raised regarding its allocation, its administration and, most importantly, its lack of reflection of real costs.

15. Essentially the Scheme does meet the basic needs on the ground but more assistance was viewed as necessary in terms of accessing funding, handling administration of programmes and the development of programmes. Some concern was expressed that elements of the YSCRSS were inflexible regarding more practical issues such as the changing of a programme's activities once the grant had been awarded, the inability to pay for guest speakers etc.

16. Finally, the very fact that the YSCRSS has funded and supported such a wide range of activities covering a vast number of young people, wide age range and geographical area between 1998-2000 would indicate that the Scheme really does provide a flexible framework for providing opportunities for practical community relations work with young people.

## **METHODOLOGY**

17. The research was organised around three main elements. The first comprised a consideration of the management and administration of the Scheme by the ELBs, the second a consideration of the youth leaders who organise and run the programmes under YSCRSS and finally a consideration of the young people who participate on the Scheme.

18. The data collected and analysed for the study included:

- ❖ an examination of all records pertaining to YSCRSS in each of the five ELBs from 1998 - 2000;
- ❖ face-to-face consultations with Youth Officers of each ELB;
- ❖ postal questionnaires to youth group leaders and participants from a random stratified sample of 100 groups (34 leaders and 275 participants responded); and
- ❖ focus groups with groups of youth group leaders and participants.

## **THE PROJECT**

19. The project was carried out for the Department of Education by Capita Consulting. The research cost £13,625.

## **REPORT**

20. The full report entitled “Research on the Youth Services Community Relations Support Scheme” is available from the Department of Education, price £5<sup>1</sup>.

*This paper is a summary of the research report and as such any views expressed are those of the authors and not necessarily those of the Department of Education.*

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*1. Each educational establishment and library is entitled to one free copy.*



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*Edited and produced by  
Statistics and Research Branch, Department of Education*