



The Northern Ireland Youth Forum
STRATEGIC PLAN 2014-2020

Message from the Executive Committee



This strategic plan represents the ambitious culmination of a great deal of work undertaken by the executive committee, in partnership with the Youth Forum's excellent staff team. It builds on and compliments the work of previous committees who we remain indebted to for their service and tireless work in progressing the aims of the organisation through challenging times in a climate of uncertainty.

You will see a renewed commitment to campaigning with and on behalf of young people to affect the change that they want to see in their lives at a personal, peer, community and societal level. Key to that has been a significant investment in our structures of participative democracy. The establishment of the Northern Ireland Youth Congress represents a significant advance in the promotion of the voice of young people in this region. Similarly a new North/South Youth Forum means that the democratic structures of the state now have parallel youth bodies. We have set aside the wait for others to act and ensured that the Youth Forum takes ambitious, bold actions to put the rights of young people first. These achievements are something we can all be proud of.

As the Youth Forum moves forward into a new chapter in its life, I have every confidence that this strategic plan will guide future committees to make good decisions that will amplify the voice of young people in Northern Ireland, strive to meet the aims of the organisation and ensure that it remains at the cutting edge of social innovation.

NIYF Executive Committee

Message from the Director



Over the past number of years the Youth Forum has continued to grow and develop. We are engaging with more young people than ever in our history and are rolling out programmes that are enjoyable; meaningful and ultimately led by young people's desire to be active in their own communities and in society. We are delighted to have continued to expand on our democracy focused

projects through the establishment of the Youth Congress and North South Youth Forum; through this strategy we will advance the development of new, innovative and bespoke methodologies for engaging with young people at a grass roots level on issues that are important to them, which inspire motivate and support young people to become leaders, in Civic society and ensure that young people have power in the decision making process.

Our core value is that we are Youth Led. We are unique in this way in that the Youth Forum is governed by a group of young people who manage and lead the organisation. This key value filters through absolutely everything we do. I firmly believe that it is this that makes us different and that enables us to truly promote the voice of young people in everything we do and influence the decision and policy making process in the purist of ways.

This 'vision 2020' strategy is an ambitious six year plan which will provide the foundations for continued development at the Youth Forum. It sets out our mission and goals as directed by young people. We aspire to continually improve in what we do; providing the highest quality youth work and offering support for young people to be champions in their own lives; amount their peers; in communities and within society.

Chris Quinn

BACKGROUND



The Northern Ireland Youth Forum is youth led. We are a membership organisation run by young people and are all about young people. Anyone aged 11-25 can become a member and / or get involved.

We were set up in 1979 by the Department of Education to represent the views of young people to government and other decision makers. We support young people to raise and discuss issues of importance to them. This includes:

- providing a regional platform for youth participation;
- working with local Youth Councils;
- organising events, activities conferences, seminars based on the issues that are important to young people;
- supporting young people to lobby and campaign and shape public policy;

To advocate for young people, we submit views to Ministers and officials from each of the departments at Stormont. The Department of Education is our sponsoring department, so we have a link with the Minister for Education, the Department of Education, the Youth Council for Northern Ireland, Education and Library Board and other statutory and voluntary organisations.

We support young people to participate in policy making local, regionally and internationally. Our core work is funded by the Department of Education via the Youth Council for NI.





This strategy was developed in consultation with our members between December 2013 and August 2014. The strategic development process was facilitated by an independent consultant and included:

- A series of Strategy Review Meetings involving Executive and staff members.
- An online Strategy Review Survey of Executive and staff members regarding vision, ideas, areas for improvement and key priorities for the future.
- Research and analyse of relevant background and contextual information in relation to the Youth Forum including assessing the needs of young people and analysing relevant local and European policies.
- A Strategy Development Residential in January 2014 involving staff and Executive members to review the previous three years and to develop a shared vision and strategy for the next six years.
- Preparing a series of drafts of the new strategy based on the outcomes of the residential development process and follow up meetings.
- A consultation with members during August 2014 to seek feedback and comments on the draft strategy with stakeholders and young people.

Voice of a Young Person



For me, the youth forum is the voice of young people in this country. We believe that all young people should be listened to and respected and that every young person, no matter their background, deserve to be heard. We provide an excellent platform to do this by working with local and national government as well as youth and social workers on the ground to provide a well-structured environment from which young people can develop.

The Youth Forum has had a massive impact on my own personal development. I joined the youth forum four years ago, in 2010, when a member came to my school

and spoke passionately of the work they did and how they helped the young people of our community. During that time I have had some unforgettable experiences; I became a member of the UK Youth Parliament, a UK Young Ambassador and a member of the Northern Ireland Youth Forum Executive. However most rewarding is the fact that every day for the past four years I have been working with an amazing group of people to bring a brighter future to our nation through an incredible generation of young people.

Whilst I have had some truly memorable and life-changing experiences, we constantly face barriers in getting the voice of young people heard and getting change enacted. However it is in these times that the Youth Forum finds resolve, when we remember why we are doing what we do and how important we are to the young people who trust in us.

I will end this piece with my vision for the youth forum, a vision I hope continues long after I leave it. I hope that the passion and drive which encapsulates the forum currently remains and that we continue to attract young people from any and all backgrounds and communities. Furthermore I hope that we continue to make inroads into local government and policy and that the influence of the forum can grow. For me, the most important vision for the youth forum is the one we have always had, to give young people a voice and a place where they can develop. This country is young when it comes to peace and stability, and it is only through organisations such as ourselves that it can continue to blossom.

Sophie Rodgers

Northern Ireland Youth Forum



Vision

A vibrant **youth led** organisation creating opportunities, **empowering** and supporting young people to have a voice and a role in building a **just**, fair and **equal society**.

Mission

The **Northern Ireland Youth Forum** is a **youth led** organisation that exists to inspire, motivate, empower and support young people to have a **voice** and effect **change** on personal; peer; community and societal levels.

The NIYF is an **independent** regional **movement** of **young activists** that promotes the voice and positive **influence** of young people locally, nationally and internationally.

Values

Our values are very important to us – they are key drivers in our work and everything we do must reflect these:

Youth led – we are entirely youth led and take our direction straight from young people. We are **young person centred** – everything we do is aimed at improving the lives of young people. We represent the views of the young people we work with at all levels of our work and support young people to represent themselves and their peers. We use a **rights based approach** – the rights of children and young people are central to everything we do. Young people identify their own needs and issues.

Equality and Inclusion—we treat everyone as equals and respect **diversity**. We believe that everyone's views and opinions should be listened to and respected. We believe young people have a responsibility to contribute to building **peace** in a post conflict society. We provide **safe spaces** for young people to engage at local, sub regional and regional levels.

Transparency, honesty and integrity

We are committed to openness and our work is based solely on the **needs** and views of young people. The work that we do must be to the highest standard as well as being **meaningful** and enjoyable for young people.

Collaboration we believe that collaboration is important. By **working together** we can affect positive change. We expect those we work with to have the same ethical base as we do.

Social Justice - we work with young people to shine a light on **injustices**, inequalities and unfairness in society locally, nationally and internationally. We support young people to take **action** to make their world a better place for all.

NIYF's Model of Participation

The Northern Ireland Youth Forum defines participation as a situation of **empowerment** – where young people are proactive in the decision making process.

We believe that there are various levels of **decision-making**. We believe that the starting place when supporting young people is in relation to the cognitive decision making process.

Participation is a process whereby Children and Young People are **proactive** in terms of decision making.

It is a process whereby Children and Young People have power and influence with regards to decisions or issues that affect their lives or that they care about.

Participation is a right. The Youth Forum provides **space, support and opportunities** for young people to exercise this right.

We believe that participation happens at a number of levels including:

- Within one's own life
- Amongst our Peers
- Within one's own community
- At a societal level

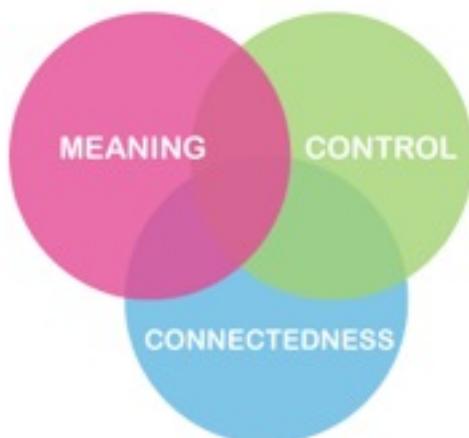
NORTHERN IRELAND YOUTH FORUM MODEL OF PARTICIPATIVE PRACTICE



HOW PARTICIPATION HAPPENS

Youth Development	Youth-Adult Partnerships	Youth-Led
Building Capacity	Participation on Decision Making Boards	Participative Structures
Skills Development	Lobbying	Campaigning
Leadership Training	Policy Engagement	Youth Congress
Peace Building	Building Participatory Practice	Executive Committee
Activism Training		Community Action
		Have Your Say - Issue Based
		Peace Building

The Foundation of NIYF's Participatory Practice



Wieringa A. (2003) *Sharing a New Story: Young People in Decision-Making*, a report for the Foundation for Young Australians, Australian Youth Research Centre, The University of Melbourne

The three question test:

Quality Assurance

1. Does it have meaning for the young people involved?

Is it:

Something young people want to do?

Something that matters to young people?

About what is happening around young people

2. Will Young People have Control?

Will young people see things happening?

Will young people be the key decision makers?

Are there sufficient resources to do it effectively?



If you have:

Meaning + **Control** - **Connectedness**

= Potential for alienation

Meaning + **Connectedness** - **Control**

= Potential for manipulation

Connectedness + **Control** - **Meaning**

= Trivial, token or decisionless decisions

When you have

Meaning + **Connectedness** + **Control** =

Meaningful Engagement

3. Is anyone listening?

Is there connectedness?

Will young people be working with others?

Is it part of something bigger?

Will there be a group experience?

Will young people get a sense of those who went before through this process?

Will I be made aware of those who may come behind me?

STRATEGIC AIMS

2014-2020

YOUTH LED

To promote, support and demonstrate best practice in youth leadership, youth participation and inclusion of young people.

CAPACITY BUILDING

To develop, train and support a network of young activists to campaign and lobby on the issues and policies that affect their lives

CAMPAIGNING

To consult with young people and promote the voice of young people to influence public policy and practice

SUSTAINABLE ORGANISATION

To continue to develop as an effective and sustainable organisation

Vision
2020

Vision 2020 provides the Youth Forum with 4 overarching strategic aims. Within each aim we have outlined priority areas of work to help us further this vision.

1. YOUTH LED: To promote, support and demonstrate best practice in youth leadership, youth participation and inclusion of young people.

- 1.1 **Recruit and support young people into leadership within youth participative structures (e.g. Youth Congress; UKYP, UKIRC, NSYF, European YF, Global YF).**
- 1.2 Research, develop and deliver community based projects to address local needs including peace building, inclusion (ethnic minorities and disability), inter cultural awareness and rurality.
- 1.3 **Develop, share, demonstrate and promote models of engagement and participation**
- 1.4 Publish and disseminate good practice and learning on youth participation.
- 1.5 **Engage in international learning and exchange projects.**
- 1.6 Develop issue-based work such as employability and entrepreneurship
- 1.7 **Connecting young people, projects and organisations to share learning and good practice.**
- 1.8 Connecting young people directly to decision makers.

2. CAPACITY BUILDING: To develop, train and support a network of young activists to campaign and lobby on the issues and policies that affect their lives.

- 2.1 **Provide training and support on campaigning and lobbying**
- 2.2 Provide a leadership-training programme to develop skills at local level.
- 2.3 **Develop and support a network of local campaigning groups.**
- 2.4 Develop training and support through schools, universities and colleges.
- 2.5 **Develop peer workers.**
- 2.6 Provide training for youth councils and school councils.
- 2.7 **Develop outreach to offer support and training.**

3. CAMPAIGNING:To promote the voice of young people to influence public policy and practice.

- 3.1 Consult and engage young people as part of the policy making process**
- 3.2 Support young people to lobby decision makers based on issues that are important to them
- 3.3 Supporting young people on to policy making and funding bodies.**
- 3.4 Promote a model of participation and adult/ youth partnership.
- 3.5 Support engagement of young people with political parties**
- 3.6 Research the views, needs and experiences of young people
- 3.7 Respond to and 'youth proof' government policies**
- 3.8 Act as advocates for young people

4. SUSTAINABLE ORGANISATION:To continue to develop as an effective and sustainable organisation.

- 4.1 Develop and grow the membership.**
- 4.2 Develop and model the role of Youth Director
- 4.3 Quality assure youth participation**
- 4.4 Develop and train the Executive.
- 4.5 Develop PR including website and social media.**
- 4.6 Review and update staff structure, terms and conditions if / when necessary.
- 4.7 Develop a social enterprise.**
- 4.10 Secure funding to deliver the strategy.
- 4.11 Develop effective partnerships and collaboration.**
- 4.12 Ensure good governance.



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