

DE Consultation on Draft Budget 2015/16

Young people's views on proposed DE cuts



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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This is a report on the findings of the Northern Ireland Youth Forum consultation on the Draft Department of Education Budget 2015/16.

The NI Youth Forum Executive Committee hosted a consultation workshop on the 13th December 2014, where young people from the Youth Forum; Youth Congress and UK Youth Parliament met to discuss the proposed DE budget cuts.

Young people welcomed the opportunity to have a say on this issue as they agreed that Education was is possibly the most important area in their lives.

Summary of key findings:

The overall conclusion of this piece of consultation was that **young people agreed that the Education budget should be protected.**

It was agreed that the value of Youth Work is well documented and that there are several studies, which highlight this – many of which are referenced within this report. Furthermore ‘social return on investment’ was discussed and it was suggested that generally speaking youth work returns at least £2 for every £1 spent – this document also includes evidence to support this.

Key Points and Statistics:

In this Year’s ‘Make Your Mark’ Campaign over **37,000 young people** from NI voted on their most important issues. **2,897 young people chose ‘fund our youth services, don’t cut them’**. This ranked as the 6th most important issue for young people in NI.

The past 25 years of government policy and more recent austerity measures have resulted a series of gross policy errors that have disproportionately affected the young.

A 10% cut to the Youth Service budget further represents a disproportionate reduction in funding to one of societies most vulnerable and discriminated against groups.

The hardship that young people face is further exasperated by disproportionate inflation of house prices; job insecurity and record highs in terms of youth unemployment; low pay; an education system that favours the top 17%; tuition fees; over-taxation; over-indebtedness; rampant consumerism and public finance crisis with massive government debt which will invariably be paid off by our young people. Our entire system appears to be weighted against the young.

It has been widely accepted that early intervention and prevention services – often provided through youth work save the public purse on the medium to long term, for example:

- The cost of placing a young person in custody is on average nearly £58,000;
- In Northern Ireland, we believe the youth justice system is populated by mainly young men;

- Young people who we speak to, that find themselves in this situation, often say that in the main, they had ended up in prison for the same reasons— an absence of effective, early interventions at times in their lives when they really needed them.

Young people have been disproportionately affected by the economic crisis that started in 2008, particularly on the labour market. Approximately one in four young people under 25 is unemployed in the North of Ireland.

Youth work has been recognised widely as part of the solution:

- Young people have become a core priority for policy makers at EU level;
- Youth policy is seen by many as a possible solution to tackle the issues and offset the negative impact of the crisis;
- In NI over 40% of young people aged 4 – 18 are involved in the youth service at any one time;
- 70% of young people's learning takes place outside of school;
- International and local research strongly affirms the contribution of youth work outcomes in helping all young people reach their educational potential.

The 'Cinderella Service':

- 1.5% of the Department of Education (NI) budget goes to the youth service.
- 92% of youth service provision inspected by ETI from 2012 – 14 was rated as good or very good in terms of overall effectiveness.
- In conclusion to this consultation young people have recommended the following:

Recommendations:

Recommendation 1:

It was agreed that the education budget should be protected.

Recommendation 2:

It is recommended that the Youth Service Budget is protected.

Recommendation 3:

The majority of Youth Work takes place and is delivered within the voluntary sector. DE's proposal is that YCNI (who fund Regional Voluntary Youth Organisations) have their budget cut by 20% and that the Statutory Youth Service have their budget cut by 7.7%.

Young people saw this as disproportionate. Whilst the Youth Forum would argue that the education budget and indeed the youth service budget should be protected, it is recommended that if cuts are unavoidable they should be shared proportionately across both voluntary and statutory sectors and that front line services should be protected.

Recommendation 4:

It is recommended that Community Relations work is strategically prioritised within the Department of Education.

Recommendation 5:

It is recommended that DE and Stormont Executive Protect as far as is possible all budgets that effect service delivery to young people. Furthermore there is an onus on the Stormont Executive to take a longer-term approach to decision and policy making.

If we accept that decisions now are building for the future, we need real change. We need new faces around tables and this needs to include young people. In this sense we would recommend a revision of the public appointments process to put in place provision for young people to be represented on public bodies – otherwise young people will continue to face institutional and societal discrimination at every level.

Recommendation 6:

Young people discussed the need to approach how budgets are allocated generally. The fact that certain parts of the budget are ring-fenced for certain things (e.g. capital and infrastructure) and departments as well as the executive appear to have little control over this seemed ludicrous.

It is therefore recommended that the entire NI budget is viewed as unrestricted to allow for a needs based approach to provision of services.

2. INTRODUCTION

The Northern Ireland Youth Forum (NIYF) is a youth led organisation dedicated to promoting the voice of young people. The Youth Forum has a particular interest in ensuring that young people from a wide range of backgrounds have the opportunity to contribute to decisions that are important to them.

Throughout its 35-year history the Youth Forum has championed the development of participation and has worked to improve policy and practice in youth work agencies. The work of the Youth Forum is diverse and wide ranging with the overall aim of promoting the voice of young people with a view to making an impact on policy development.

Members of the Youth Forum asked staff to help them carry out a piece of work seeking the views of young people on the issue of the proposed cuts and the impact it would have on their lives, both now in the short term as well as in the future.

3. POINTS FOR CONSIDERATION: KEY POINTS FROM OTHER RELEVANT CONSULTATIONS WITH YOUNG PEOPLE; STATISTICS AND RESEARCH

'What we want Consultation' (2009) – Priorities for Youth Pre Consultation:

- Young people felt that “having nothing to do” made them vulnerable to experimenting with criminal activity
- Young people “want to live happy, healthy lives, hang out with their friends in safe spaces, know there is someone they can turn to if they need help and be both respected and listened to by adults”
- “Young people from disadvantaged communities were of the view that there was a lack of facilities in their areas. They felt that alcohol use was inevitable because there was nowhere to go and nothing to do”
- “14% of young people in the street-based consultation see their future as going on benefits”
- Places to go, things to do, mental health, self-esteem, positive body image and self-confidence were mentioned as important issues for young people.

Priorities for Youth Video Diary (2012)

“I feel that the government are kind of taking it out on young people more than they're taking it out on the adults because they feel that we won't do anything about it, or we won't stand, but they should actually be trying to fix it for us because we're their future, so the mess they made is falling back on us!”

“Department of Education could help this [issues for young people] by educating children and young people on these issues and putting workshops in place”

Q: Has youth work ever helped you?

- “made me get involved in the community”
- “it makes me feel like I'm having a change in my own community”
- “you get to interact with other people and communities”
- “stuff to do when you've got nothing to do”
- “meet new people”
- “experiencing different things that you haven't experienced before”
- “when you need to talk to someone my youth worker was there and I could talk to them”
- “helped me make new friends”
- “get better at talking and socialising”

NIYF Priorities for Youth Response (2012)

EU Youth Strategy, a “Renewed framework for European cooperation in the youth field 92010-2018”):

“Support politically and financially youth organisations, as well as local and national youth councils and promote recognition of their important role in democracy.”

Q: What are the needs of young people in your area?

- “For youth groups and clubs to be there for them”
- “To have more facilities for them to get away from drink, drunk, underage driving and smoking”
- “I feel the services should be expanded as some clubs don’t have funding”

Q: Why do young people participate in youth provision?

- “To be part of a group and to openly participate in a worthwhile and beneficial group that could potentially change society”
- “To escape from the house and meet new friends, get different experiences and make connections”
- “Self-development, to gain qualifications, opportunities, fun, support, something to do, community development, to meet other young people, to support other young people, to experience new sporting activities, an interest in what there is to offer”

Other Comments:

- Young people felt that “having nothing to do” made them vulnerable to experimenting with criminal activity
- Young people “want to live happy, healthy lives, hang out with their friends in safe spaces, know there is someone they can turn to if they need help and be both respected and listened to by adults”
- Young people from disadvantaged communities were of the view that there was a lack of facilities in their areas. They felt that alcohol use was inevitable because there was nowhere to go and nothing to do
- 14% of young people in the street-based consultation see their future as going on benefits
- Places to go, things to do, mental health, self-esteem, positive body image and self-confidence were mentioned as important issues for young people

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Key Statistics:

The proposed cut to the youth service budget is £3 million – this is further broken down to:

- Youth Council NI – £1m reduction from £5.1 million (20% cut)
- ELB Youth Services – £2m reduction from £26 million (8% cut)
- Another budget to be cut is the Department’s entire CRED budget of £1.1million

European Policy:

The EU Youth Strategy (2010-2018) is the policy cooperation framework of the EU for youth; it has two overall objectives:

- To provide more and equal opportunities for young people in education and in the labour market;
- To encourage young people to be active citizens and participate in society.

These main dimensions (in no particular order) can be summarised as:

- Targeting disadvantaged young people;
- Preventative youth work and youth facilities;
- Ensuring quality youth work;
- Evidence-based practice;
- Develop a system or infrastructure to support youth work.

The first dimension of targeting disadvantaged young people and those at risk of social exclusion is a priority in many countries/communities across the EU. In particular, special funding streams in countries such as Ireland, Latvia, England and Northern Ireland have been ear-marked to give priority for those from disadvantaged and marginalised backgrounds.

Social Return on Investment:

At a recent SROI event, the facilitator undertook an SROI on the Youth Forum's 'Champions 4 Change' programme; it resulted in an SROI of **£8 for every £1 invested**.

When the facilitator studied the programme further, to take into account that the project is working with some young people (4) who were under paramilitary threat he began to attempt to calculate the savings to the criminal justice system and medical intervention costs of someone who was the victim of a punishment shooting as opposed to someone who was under threat but due to our intervention was not shot.

The eventual SORI was calculated in the region of £16 per £1 invested.

4. FINDINGS

Young people considered carefully the proposed cuts and in doing so reflected on relevant research and statistics.

It should be noted from the outset that the process it's self must be questioned – i.e. timing of this consultation; and the exceptional circumstances we find ourselves, which are ultimately a result of cuts that have been imposed on the Stormont Executive from the Westminster Government. The consultation process is ordinarily cumbersome and not 'youth friendly' – the process employed with regards to this consultation and the widespread financial crisis that all departments are suffering further marginalises young peoples voices in the process. Young people have a right to have a say on issues that affect them. Education is arguably one of the most important issues for young people.

The cuts where discussed at length. Young people acknowledged that cuts need to be made but discussed what areas of where most important to society and what budgets should be protected.

It was agreed that the education budget should be protected: (Recommendation 1)

- Young people considered the long-term effect of education cuts, particularly for young people on the margins.
- Discussion took place around those with special needs and it was agreed that to cut funding for children and young people in this area was unfathomable.

Without education there are no doctors – no politicians – without education every other area of peoples lives would be affected.

The value of Youth Work:

It is widely accepted that Youth Work is of particular value to society:

“Youth work’s non-formal approach to education is as important as formal education in terms of young people’s engagement in both learning & development” (John O’Dowd 14/11/14)

The Youth service is recognised as a vehicle for engaging with all young people and especially those who are on the extreme margins. Youth work’s impact on further education was discussed with young people giving many examples of the impact that youth work has had on their lives. Discussion included the impact on formal education – including primary; post primary and third level; as well as how the youth service ‘picks up the pieces that the (formal) education system leaves behind for most young people’ as one young person described it.

‘Many young people that suffer negatively and are socially deprived benefit hugely from youth services. Often youth services help the young people at the bottom and in the middle whereas the formal education service helps those at the top more’.

Youth work demonstrates exceptional value for money. According to research conducted by the National Youth Council of Ireland entitled 'Assessment of the Economic Value of Youth Work' (2012), not only do the benefits outweigh the costs but also that the ratio of benefits versus costs was 2.2:1. i.e. for each euro of costs the value of benefits is 2.2 euro. This calculation was based on the assumption of sustained levels of funding to the programmes and equivalent benefits over the period of 10 years. The study also assumed that had there not been targeted youth work programmes in place in areas of justice, health, etc., the state would ultimately have to face significantly higher costs than those of youth work programmes.

It is recommended that the Youth Service Budget is protected. **(Recommendation 2)**

The impact of youth services:

Youth services bring significant added value to young people's lives and enhance their learning; personal development and bring a plethora of additional outcomes.

One young people shared their own story: I am severely dyslexic and have struggled at times. Through the support that I get outside of school through youth work etc I have been able to reach my full potential. I am now looking forward to applying to go to university.

Young people discussed the impact of being listened to – the impact that this has on their wider lives and society. Young people discussed the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, the various pieces of legislation both locally and internationally that all highlight the importance of having a say on the issues that affect one's life. It was agreed that these things are in place for a very clear reason. It was also agreed that it is well documented that this kind of work requires resources.

'My experiences with Youth@CLC and the NIYF Executive Committee has really enriched my life and made me a better person. Now I can be an advocate for other young people'

The formal education system was noted to not work for so many young people. It was noted that the biggest expulsion rate is first 3 months of 5th year; it was also noted that some schools do not allow certain pupils to sit exams and that pupils are often forced to repeat years because of school league tables. Again, youth work was seen by young people as a service / place that counterbalances this.

Schools don't support average students enough. They praise the schools that are really good – and the students who get multiple A*s...

Young people reflected on other societies and education systems; and acknowledged the gaps in our education system that Youth Work arguably fills, the following were noted:

- Communication;
- Participation;
- Confidence;

- Resilience;

Young people also reflected on evidence from local and international research. Young people were particularly drawn to European Commission Research entitled '*Working with young people: the value of youth work in the European Union*' (Feb, 2014). The report highlights well European wide evidence and outcomes for young people. Young people highlighted that through engagement in youth work, young people:

- Develop certain skills and competences;
- Strengthen their network and their social capital; and
- Change certain behaviours.

Even more, for some people, their engagement in youth work constituted a life changing experience. Young people continually noted that through youth work they gain self-efficacy, resilience, communication skills and confidence. Social and inter-personal skills are also frequently mentioned, though not always using consistent vocabulary.

*Through my experiences with the local **ELB; NIYF and Springboard** I have had life changing experiences. I do not know where I would be without this kind of stuff. Youth workers have encouraged and supported me to stay in school and I have benefited from international experiences, which truly changed me and allowed me to pull myself out of crisis situations.*

'UKYP gave me confidence to speak and amazing opportunities'.

Young people discussed motivation and inspiration, autonomy and self-determination, social-confidence and interpersonal skills.

According to the European Commission report Youth Work Promotes bonding; fosters resilience; promotes social, emotional, cognitive, behavioural, and moral competence; fosters self-determination; fosters spirituality; fosters self-efficacy; fosters clear and positive identity; fosters belief in the future; provides recognition for positive behaviour and opportunities for pro-social involvement; and fosters pro-social norms (healthy standards for behaviour)

Through Youth Work Social skills: communication skills, influencing skills and other interpersonal skills, such as rapport, tact and empathy are developed.

Relationship with others: pro-social skills, leadership, and decision-making skills; sense of self; self-esteem and confidence are all outcomes of effective youth work.

The list goes on and on and includes communication skills, computer skills, conflict resolution, decision making, goal setting, leadership skills, money management skills, performance skills (e.g., music), planning/organising, problem solving, public speaking skills, social/ interpersonal skills, and task orientation.

Several studies also point out the importance of positive relationships built through youth work. Positive relationships with others are seen by researchers as a key aspect of youth development and youth work can facilitate the creation of such relationships. Positive bonding with peers and adults is not only a contribution to young persons' well-being, but it also acts in preventing anti-social behaviour.

'Without positive things to engage in the chances of young people engaging in risk taking behaviour increases. I've been there myself; nowhere to, go nothing to do, no one to talk to.....'

According to a review of US programmes in youth work and their evaluations, bonding is a construct frequently present in these measures Coburn in her ethnographic analysis of young people from street cultures who were engaged in youth work shows how the positive relationships created cultural and social capital that led young people to profound realisations and understanding about themselves and the world. (Coburn, 2011, Building Social and Cultural Capital through learning about equality in youth work, in Journal of Youth Studies, Vol.14, No 4)

Several studies in the US looked at the relationship between children's and young persons' participation in extra-curricular activities and school attainment. While studies show a positive correlation between participation in extra-curricular activities and school attainment, the nature of this relationship is not always clear. The influence of other student characteristics, namely their socio-economic background, remains important. However, some studies suggest that the participation in non-formal learning activities contributes to the development of non-cognitive skills, which in turn positively influence attainment, including when controlling for the influence of socio-economic background.

More recent research highlights the importance of social and emotional skills development in young people for their future pathways. It points to the fact that the development of these skills can help societies, if not to fully close, at least narrow the gap created by socio-economic disadvantage. These non-cognitive skills cover a range of characteristics, often referred to with different vocabulary, including social skills (interpersonal skills like rapport, tact or empathy), but also self-efficacy, motivation, aspiration or persistence. These are skills that youth work aims to develop (among other things). For example, Carneiro et al. (2007) found that improvement in non-cognitive skills (at the age of 7) is associated with improvement in education outcomes (at age 42). Interestingly, they also found that for persons from low socio-economic backgrounds the influence of non-cognitive skills on their later outcomes is greater than for persons from higher socio-economic categories.

Young people discussed these findings and suggested that disadvantaged young people in particular can benefit from activities that help them improve non-cognitive skills. These skills lead to better academic outcomes and higher qualifications. Youth work offers such development opportunities.

The recent Eurofound study on NEETs (2012), highlights the severe adverse consequences for young people, societies and for the economy, of young people who do not participate in work, education and training, and the potential risks this exposes the young person to, including disaffection, poor future employment prospects, youth-offending, and mental and physical health problems. The contribution of youth work to the participation of young people can be looked at from different angles:

- *Participation in bodies that represent young people in local, regional or national decision-making;*
- *Awareness raising activities and information campaigns related to aspects such as voting or civic rights;*
- *Activities aimed at preparing young people for participation through development of their critical thinking and awareness of political and social issues;*

(ref: Eurofound (2012) NEETs: Young people not in employment, education or training: Characteristics, costs and policy responses in Europe.)

The majority of Youth Work takes place and is delivered within the voluntary sector. DE's proposal is that YCNI (who fund Regional Voluntary Youth Organisations) have their budget cut by 20% and that the Statutory Youth Service have their budget cut by 7.7%. This was seen by young people as disproportionate. Whilst the Youth Forum would argue that the education budget and indeed the youth service budget should be protected, it is suggested that if cuts are unavoidable they should be shared proportionately across both voluntary and statutory sectors and that front line services should be protected.

(Recommendation 3)

Community Relations:

It was noted by many that youth work provides the only place where many young people get to engage meaningfully with young people from other backgrounds.

'Challenge for youth was the first time I met people from an other religion. Now that they are closed we don't have an opportunity to do this anymore.'

*'I don't like sport and didn't like the scouts; the **Friends Forever project (Belfast YMCA)** - where we went to America and lived together for 2 weeks was life changing for me. 5 Catholics, 5 Protestants, no phones... it was amazing. We went on the trip and then done all of the work. Although I knew some people from different backgrounds friends forever really changed things for all of us.'*

*'Most of the people in my area don't have friends who are Catholics... **youth work gave me the opportunity to make friends from other backgrounds.** This would not have happened otherwise.'*

Facilitating opportunities for cross community engagement are crucial, given that most young people in NI are educated separately and depressingly it has been noted that *"it is still possible for many children to make the transition into adulthood without having had any meaningful contact or interaction with people from another religion, nationality or race."* 1.18 (CRED Policy)

'Equipping children and young people with the skills, attitudes and behaviours needed to recognise, understand and respect difference... is particularly important as we continue to deal with the legacy of the conflict and move towards a shared and inclusive society'. (John O'Dowd, re: PFY, 2013)

Over the years a number of initiatives and review processes have highlighted the important contribution of Youth Service to the creation, development and maintenance of a peaceful society (see for example 1999; DENI, A Model for Effective Practice, 1987 (*updated 2003*); DENI, A Youth Service for a New Millennium; DENI, CRED Policy Guidance notes, 2011).

It is recommended that Community Relations work is strategically prioritised within the Department of Education. **(Recommendation 4)**

Depth and breadth of the Youth Service:

Young people discussed how youth work offers a wide and diverse educational service. They discussed that 70% of young people's learning takes place outside of the classroom and agreed that the value of youth work is not always recognised.

It has been well documented that youth work contributes to increased confidence in young people, opens new opportunities and enabled new training opportunities, contributing to the Department of Education's aim to tackle educational underachievement and raising educational standards for all.

The youth service is essentially a voluntary service with over 22,000 volunteers contributing to registered youth service delivery on an annual basis. Within a service of this nature there are no alternative budgets from which work can be progressed.

'Youth work is so broad and the vast numbers of young people and volunteers involved speaks for it's self'.

Wide scale cuts directly targeted at young people and cross cutting nature of Youth Work:

Young people argued that they continue to be on the receiving end of unfair cuts. They discussed how they are paying and will continue to pay for an economic crisis, which is not of their doing.

The hardship that young people face is further exasperated by disproportionate inflation of house prices; job insecurity and record highs in terms of youth unemployment; low pay; an education system that favours the top 17%; tuition fees; over-taxation; over-indebtedness; rampant consumerism and public finance crisis with massive government debt which will invariably be paid off by our young people. Our entire system appears to be weighted against the young.

The past 25 years of government policy and more recent austerity measures have resulted a series of gross policy errors that have disproportionately benefited the old at the expense of the young.

Not just the DE budget that will effect young people – services to young people will be cut across all departments and will effect all areas of young people's lives; young people noted the following areas:

- DARD: -5.2%
- DECAL: -10%
- DEL: -10.8%
- DETI: -5.3%
- DHSSPS: -3.3%
- DOE: -11.1%
- DOJ: -6%
- DRD: -4%
- DSD: - 9.9%

'People are going to be screwed over from 11 or 12 now – or even younger from 4 or 5 – even before they think about university or anything like that'

Young people agreed that it is now time to make a stand:

'If we let this go now they think it will be ok to continue to put more cuts on us'

Young people voiced the opinion that the youth sector is already a massively underfunded service. One young person commented how the 'youth service is 1.5% of an entirely different bigger budget...'

'Youth work cuts across other sectors – health; good relations; formal education; sports; culture; arts; the list goes on. Youth work is core to some much else.'

It is recommended that DE and Stormont Executive Protect as far as is possible all budgets that effect service delivery to young people. Furthermore there is an onus on the Stormont Executive to take a longer-term approach to decision and policy making. If we accept that decisions now are building for the future, we need real change. We need new faces around tables and this needs to include young people. In this sense we would recommend a revision of the public appointments process to put in place provision for young people to be represented on public bodies – otherwise young people will continue to face institutional and societal discrimination at every level. **(Recommendation 5)**

Is there a better way to spend money?

Young people discussed the need to approach how budgets are allocated generally. The fact that certain parts of the budget are ring-fenced for certain things and departments as well as the executive appear to have little control over this seemed ludicrous.

It is therefore recommended that the entire NI budget is viewed as unrestricted to allow for a needs based approach to provision of services. **(Recommendation 6)**

5. RECOMMENDATIONS:

In conclusion to this consultation young people have recommended the following:

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