



Enhancing the Contribution of Youth Organisations to Youth Employment

Seminar Report

2 July 2014, Dublin

Compiled by Dr John Bamber and Ellen Garvey, Centre for Effective Services

On Wednesday 2 July 2014 the Centre for Effective Services, Foroige, the National Youth Council of Ireland and Youth Work Ireland held a seminar on **Enhancing the Contribution of Youth Organisations to Youth Employment**. The overriding purpose of this event was for participants to exchange views, identify key opportunities and consider barriers and obstacles to improving the labour market prospects of young people. Going forward the organising committee is committed to prompting a longer term process of thinking and development in and beyond the youth sector.

This brief report provides:

- A list of the formal presentations
- A summary of the key messages arising from group discussions on enhancing the visibility of youth work's potential, building new partnerships, ensuring implementation, and delivering quality and innovative youth work.
- Links to key reports mentioned on the day and other useful resources

Seminar Programme

10.00 - 10.20	Welcome and Opening Address Mary Cunningham, CEO, National Youth Council of Ireland
10.20 - 10.35	Social and economic situation of young people in Ireland Marie Claire McAleer, Senior Research and Policy Officer, National Youth Council of Ireland
10.35 - 10.50	Connecting Europe, National and Local Levels in responding to youth unemployment Dr John Bamber, Project Specialist, Centre for Effective Services
10.50 – 11.00	Questions and Answers
11.20 – 11.35	Working With Statutory Agencies Christine Lodge, Manager, Ballymun Regional Youth Resource
11.35 – 11.50	Bringing Partners to the Table Louise Fitzpatrick, Area Liaison Officer, City of Dublin Youth Service Board
11.50 – 12.05	Reaching the Hard to Reach Cora Hogan, CEO, Tipperary Regional Youth Service
12.05 – 12.20	Questions and Answers
12.20 - 13.05	Group Discussion <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Enhancing the visibility of youth work's potential 2. Building new partnerships 3. Ensuring Implementation 4. Delivering quality and innovative youth work
13.05 – 13.20	Reflection and Next Steps Mary Cunningham, CEO, National Youth Council of Ireland

Presentations

Welcome and Opening Address

Mary Cunningham, CEO, National Youth Council of Ireland

Mary emphasised the need for deeper and more collaborative relationships between voluntary and statutory bodies, and that the seminar was a small example of this working together. She stressed the importance of the formal inputs from a variety of speakers and perspectives, and the value of discussion between and feedback from the participants.

Social and economic situation of young people in Ireland

Marie-Claire McAleer, Senior Research and Policy Officer, National Youth Council of Ireland

Marie-Claire gave an overview of the social and economic situation of young people in Ireland, including Eurofound statistics and the impact of youth unemployment on social inclusion, health and housing. Marie-Claire reiterated the need for a strong collaborative and long term relationship between all the parties that can support the pathway to employment for young people.

Connecting Europe, National and Local Levels in responding to youth employment

Dr John Bamber, Project Specialist, Centre for Effective Services

John emphasised the need for a fresh approach to an intractable and universal problem, and that much could be learned from the European dimension. John is currently the Chairperson of the European Commission's thematic expert group on promoting young peoples' creativity and innovation through non-formal and informal learning. He gave an overview of their recent report, which emphasises the need for a high-level policy response, and gives practical examples of how to promote innovation and creativity. John also spoke about the crucial importance of partnerships between different sectors, education, non-formal education, business, local government and so on, at local level.

The Expert Group's report can be accessed [here](#)

Working with Statutory Agencies

Christine Lodge, Manager, Ballymun Regional Youth Service

Christine outlined the Ballymun Regional Youth Resource (BRYR) experience in working with statutory agencies as part of the Local Implementation Group for the Ballymun Youth Guarantee Pilot. Christine reflected on the reservations, challenges and successes for youth agencies in working with statutory agencies, what BRYR has gained through the relationships built, and the successes of the Youth Guarantee pilot so far.

Christine's presentation can be accessed [here](#)

Bringing Partners to the Table

Louise Fitzpatrick, Area Liaison Officer, City of Dublin Youth Service Board

Mick Cowman, Regional Manager, Bradóg Regional Youth Service

Louise and Mick shared their learning on engaging partners in the Youth Employment Programme (YEP!) network. Louise stated that a shared vision is at the core a successful network and noted that

getting partners to the table may be easy, but keeping them there requires finding out *why* partners are there and having something in it for everyone. Challenges include the time and energy that it takes to engage with and to sustain relationships with partners, while establishing strong links with funders and policy makers.

Reaching the Hard to Reach

Cora Hogan, CEO, Tipperary Regional Youth Service (TRYs)

Cora outlined the particular challenges for the young unemployed in rural areas, and described the range of short, medium, and long (1 year) youth employment programmes offered by TRYs. Cora discussed the TRYs approach to *reaching the hard to reach* which includes meeting young people 'where they're at', work experience, providing relevant skills and training, offering ongoing support and progression, going back to basics (e.g. interview skills, money minding), through integrated and structured programmes.

Key messages arising from the group discussion

During the seminar participants had the opportunity to engage in a focused discussion based on questions related to the [Dublin Declaration](#). The declaration covered four main areas in respect to youth work and employment issues:

1. Enhancing the visibility of youth work's potential

What are the challenges and possibilities for youth work in recognising, validating or accrediting personal and social learning and skills development?

2. Building new partnerships

What are the potential rewards and likely dangers for youth work in developing strategic partnerships with employers and the business community to maximise and enhance employment opportunities?

3. Ensuring implementation

What will it take to ensure that youth work is central to youth employment initiatives; in particular the implementation of the Youth Guarantee?

4. Delivering quality and innovative youth work

What are the barriers to promoting innovative youth work practice that is responsive to the changing needs of young people, broader society, and the needs of the labour market, for example through support for social entrepreneurship?

Following the seminar participants were also asked to feedback further ideas about how to respond to youth employment issues. The aim was not simply to identify issues and problems but also to consider how to take things forward in a realistic and practical manner. The key messages from the discussion and the feedback are summarised below.

Enhancing the visibility of youth work's potential

The challenge is to persuade mainstream service providers that this work is essential to the achievement of their goals. Communicating the value of youth work and 'soft supports' must therefore be a prime objective of youth organisations at a national and local level. Enhancing the visibility and recognition of youth work requires a common language, and key messages to help employers and other stakeholders to understand the premise and values of youth work, and how youth work activities can contribute to employability. In addition, formal acknowledgement from larger businesses on the value of youth work would contribute to more understanding from small and medium sized employers and the general public. This message also needs to be shared and recognised at a national level, for example, in all levels of the formal education system, in government departments (DSP), and in Solas.

There is a need to share examples of successful employment related youth work activities and best practice in youth work, in a variety of ways and with a range of audiences. This means documenting and communicating the benefits/outcomes of pilot projects and providing clarity about how the youth work sector can deliver similar outcomes in a national rollout of the Youth Guarantee.

It is also necessary to ensure that other sectors are aware of youth work and its contribution - which will require more publicity (for the value of youth work in reducing youth unemployment) -

showcasing the work to these other sectors. The youth sector has to mobilise to speak up about its work locally and nationally. At a local level, the best advertisement is that local groups doing the work well are being promoted by other organisations. It will require:

- Collation of data from existing pilot projects to demonstrate progression of young people engaged in employment initiatives to be presented to DSP
- Presentations to businesses/employers grouped nationally – clear information about supporting such initiatives
- Dissemination to youth organisations of locally developed Youth Guarantee/Labour Activation models
- A nationwide PR campaign undertaken by the youth work sector to educate other sectors on youth work and its contribution
- A roadshow type event on up-skilling the sector to understand what they do and enhance their ability to articulate the language of youth work/employability.

There is also a need to find out the extent to which accreditation is important to employers, and to ensure that accreditation/recognition includes both qualitative and quantitative measures.

There is much potential yet to be realised in young people recognising and naming the skills and competencies they've gained through youth work. Online support to complete CVs, for example, could be useful in helping young people in recording learning/skills that are not easily measured.

Building new partnerships

To more effectively address the employment needs of young people it will be necessary to counter the siloed nature of provision, and to improve interagency sharing and communication at all levels. This will require leadership from the 'top' with interdepartmental and associate organisation co-operation, for example between DES, JEI, DCYA, and DSP.

The introduction of the Youth Guarantee is the main policy development in this area and the Steering Group model in Ballymun must be examined, assessed and learning extracted to inform the roll out of the Guarantee in other parts of the country. This will require constructive engagement with decision-makers in DSP at national but also at regional and local level.

Engagement means building new partnerships and stronger links between ETBs, employers and youth work at a local level. Local Development Companies who will be involved in implementing the new Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme across the country from 2015, could be potential allies to youth work organisations in articulating the need for the 'soft supports' whose value is so often overlooked by those in search of 'hard' outputs on employment and training programmes. The Children's Services Committees, also present opportunities for dialogue and hopefully for practical cross-sectoral collaboration. But to be successful a number of challenges need to be addressed.

One challenge is to ensure that youth work doesn't become only labour market orientated or that the focus isn't narrowed to a specific skills base rather than broader skills required by employers. If the corporate sector do get involved and over-push their brand then youth workers could get

dragged into other peoples' agendas. However, this can be avoided with clearly defined roles and relationships between all partners. Attending to power balances may also help to ensure that relationships between partners stay respectful and productive.

Youth workers need to clearly articulate what they bring to the table and advocate for a process of 'co-design'. At local level, a framework can be used to identify the contribution of each partner – the specific inputs they bring, the competencies and skills of all partners, and the particular outcomes valued by each individual/sector. The partnership needs to recognise that everyone brings something valuable to the table but a shared vision and common goal is crucial. The importance of a long-term vision, strategic planning and evaluation/reflection on the partnership over time cannot be over-stated.

The value of young people as partners should not be over-looked. Young people could be incentivised for developing strategic partnerships with employers. Young people should also be helped to become more aware of the needs of the labour market and the needs of employers.

Ensuring implementation

Clarity is needed around:

- Who is eligible for the Youth Guarantee
- How the Youth Guarantee is going to be rolled out
- The potential role and contribution of youth work within it

Establishing clear messages on what the Youth Guarantee is about will help in developing a common strategy that all stakeholders accept. The role of the youth sector needs to be recognised by stakeholders as potential partners for the Youth Guarantee in order for it to be implemented successfully.

There is a need for a lead coordinating body to oversee the roll out of the Youth Guarantee with all stakeholders, and for champions at the national and local levels to create an understanding of the importance of youth work. The role and contribution needs to be operationalised, with youth work organisations being named as partners and delivery agents. A budget has to be ring-fenced within the Youth Guarantee for youth work innovations. Structures need to enable youth organisations to have meaningful inputs into the plans of the state agencies, and how these agencies spend their budgets.

One concrete suggestion is for a new practical programme with budgets for a range of local and national youth organisations, ensuring a balance between rural and urban providers. It could be a pilot which is evidence informed, builds in local and vertical partnerships, and has money for evaluation and data collection. It could also be an exemplar, not just of youth employment strategies, but of how a government funding scheme does business. It could test the process by which, for example, DCYA grants that currently flow down to the local level, could be administered in a way that ensures rigorous analysis and clear linkages to policy objectives. It could show how National Outcomes can be linked to deliverables at local level, and bring to life the way that the philosophy of youth work links to state objectives. It could also be a testing ground (on a manageable level) for joined up government.

Recognising the need for a local area-based approach to youth employment issues would take account of the difficulty in replicating the Youth Guarantee because of different needs across the country.

There is a need to consider whether youth workers have the necessary skills required to deliver employment related activities in a way that complements formal education and training. Additional resources will be required if the youth sector is to undertake more work in relation to youth employment issues.

Delivering quality and innovative youth work

It needs to be recognised that there may be a tension between a labour activation model and a more holistic personal development/non-formal learning model favoured by youth work. However, as labour activation means different things to different people, there is a need for a sector-wide agreement on what the priorities are in relation to labour activation.

Because youth work addresses wider social aspects beyond economic participation, including youth work in the design of services should enable a focus on young people as a whole, rather than just their employment skills. At the same time, there is a need to ensure that there is a role/voice/input for young people in the design and implementation process, e.g. in the rollout of the Youth Guarantee.

Regarding resources and funding, there needs to be allowance for some resources to be channelled toward innovation. This would mean less need to achieve certain prescribed outcomes or to meet certain criteria.

Conclusion

Overall the event was considered to be successful. Participants valued the stimulating inputs while having a chance to contribute to focused discussions on an important topic. The general consensus was that there is much potential in the youth work offer, but a great deal of work now needs to be done to bring this to fruition.

Useful reports and links to resources

The Youth Guarantee

The latest information from the European Commission is available [here](#)

Eurofound

The European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (Eurofound) is a tripartite European Union Agency, whose role is to provide knowledge in the area of social and work-related policies. Eurofound was established in 1975 by [Council Regulation \(EEC\) No. 1365/75](#) to contribute to the planning and design of better living and working conditions in Europe.

Eurofound's work on young people and employment is available [here](#)

European Youth Forum

2013 Policy Paper on Youth Employment. Adopted at the Council of Members - Brussels, Belgium, 19 -20 April COMEM/GA 0166-13-FINAL. Available [here](#)

Souto-Otero, M., Ulicna, D., Schaepkens, L. and Bognar, V. (2013) The impact of non-formal education in youth organizations on young people's employability. Brussels: European Youth Forum. Available [here](#)

New Philanthropy Capital

Copps, J. and Plimmer, D. (2013) Inspiring Impact: the Journey to Employment. A Guide to Understanding and Measuring What Matters for Young People. Featuring the Journey to Employment (JET) Framework. London: New Philanthropy Capital. Available [here](#)

National Children's Bureau

Blades, R., Fauth, B. and Gibb, J. (2012) Measuring Employability Skills. A rapid review to inform development of tools for project evaluation. London: National Children's Bureau. Available [here](#)

Accenture

Shanks, R., O'Neill, N. and O'Mahony, A. (2013) Closing the Skills Gap in Ireland: Employers at the Heart of the Solution. Dublin: Accenture. Available [here](#)

National Youth Council of Ireland

Report and videos from a 2010 conference on youth unemployment available [here](#)