Working with young people: the value of youth work in the European Union

Country Report
Ireland
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Working with young people: the value of youth work in the EU
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Working with young people: The value of youth work in the EU

Country report: Ireland

Author: Ilona Murphy

This report presents the situation as of February 2013
1 Introduction: tradition, definitions and concepts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>KEY FACTS</th>
<th>RESPONSE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Definition for youth work</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legal definition for youth work</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approximate length of youth work tradition</td>
<td>Late 1800’s – over 120 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approximate length of formal / professional youth work tradition</td>
<td>Since the 1960’s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overview of relative importance of youth work in supporting young people</td>
<td>Increased</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Main sectors/fields of formal / professional / statutory youth work</td>
<td>Education Some involvement in Justice, Health, Arts, Entrepreneurship and Innovation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Main sectors / fields of non-formal / third sector led youth work</td>
<td>Justice, Health, Entrepreneurship and Innovation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 1.1 Definitions

Youth work in Ireland is primarily focused on those between 10 to 24 years of age and is explicitly defined in the *Youth Work Act 2001*\(^1\) as follows:

> *A planned programme of education designed for the purpose of aiding and enhancing the personal and social development of young people through their voluntary involvement, and which is complementary to their formal, academic or vocational education and training and provided primarily by voluntary youth work organisations*.

The definition enshrines that youth work is above all else an educational endeavour and it should therefore complement other types of educational provision\(^2\). It also emphasises that young people who participate in youth work do so on a voluntary basis. The definition also makes clear that youth work is for the most part carried out by organisations which are non-statutory or non-governmental.

Key similarities and differences can be made between the Irish definition of youth work and the definition of youth work presented in the EU Youth Strategy in so far that the focus of personal and social development of young people in the context of youth work in Ireland is in line with the EU definition of youth work. More specific similarities include the focus on non-formal learning and the voluntary participation of young people. Although the role of voluntary youth workers and youth leaders is made clear in the European definition of youth work, the primacy of voluntary organisations in the direct delivery of youth work is made explicitly clear in the Irish definition of youth work.

Whilst the Youth Work Act 2001 sets the basis of the definition of youth work, the Department for Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA) are committed to developing a Youth Policy Framework as part of the wider Children's and Young People's Policy Framework. It is intended that other aspects of the Youth Work Act, 2001 may be reviewed in the context of the development of the Youth Policy Framework.

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1.2 Tradition and development of youth work

During the 19th and early 20th Centuries, the major social professions in Ireland, including youth work, social work, community work and social care were philanthropic in nature and typically church-based. Indeed, up until the 1990’s the Church rather than the State was the main provider of social care and other social services, such as education, hospitals and social work. In youth work, the main early providers (who continue to be amongst the main providers today) therefore had links with one or more of the churches. Following the institutional decline of the Catholic Church and changes in the social demography of Ireland, the state has increasingly assumed responsibility for the provision of social services. The development of youth work today exists primarily within the non-statutory (voluntary) sector.

Vast economic changes in Ireland over the past two decades have also had a significant impact on the development of youth work. These changes are characterised by a recession during the 1980s, high emigration and political activism followed by an economic boom from the mid 90’s until 2007 to a situation where Ireland fell into recession, with considerable contraction in GDP. As a result, the context of young people’s lives in Ireland changed dramatically within a few short years. As reported by Leahy and Burgess (2010)3, the effect of the economic crisis on young people was serious with 24% of 15-24 years old being unemployed. Emigration by young people reached levels not seen since the 1980s and youth suicide rates were reported to be a grave source of concern4.

Over the past 10 years, on balance youth work has increased in importance; with significant increases in funding for youth work (core) organisations and youth work activities – though in recent years cuts in funding have been made. However clear advances in youth work are indicative of a newly recognised Government Department (Department for Children and Youth Affairs) and appointment of a National Assessor of Youth Work within that Department. These appointments represent a distinct move towards youth work being more strategic and professional as enhanced by the development and implementation of the National Quality Standards Framework for youth work (see below). In addition the development of the Youth Work Policy framework currently underway is thought to hold potential for significant progress in the field. Measuring the impact and value of youth work is increasingly important as reinforced at a recent symposium on exploring outcomes in youth work and related provision5.

As reinforced in the Programme of the Irish Presidency of the Council of the European Union, there is a strong focus on the contribution of quality youth work to the development, well-being and social inclusion of young people. Here youth work has a significant role to play in equipping young people with the skills they need to meet life’s challenges and is a route to a more inclusive society. With a growing emphasis on the participation of young people in Irish democracy/society, there is an increased focus on citizenship and participation through exercising young people’s right to vote and reducing the voting age from 18. At a time of high youth unemployment, there is also a greater focus on employability and entrepreneurship. There is also an increased emphasis on supporting young people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender

and an increased focus on health – particularly around mental, sexual and physical health.

1.3 The current situation: the delivery of formal and non-formal youth work

Youth work in Ireland exists nearly exclusively within the non-statutory sector. It is delivered primarily through third sector organisations and is characterised by an ethos of ‘volunteerism’ long reflected in Irish society. Non-formal youth work in Ireland is intended for young people between 10–24 years of age (as defined in the Youth Work Act 2001) from all aspects of Irish life, urban, rural, all nationalities and social classes and spans a wide range of organisations and activities. Children under the age of 10 are also involved in youth work activities provided by a number of youth work organisations such as Scouting Ireland, Irish Girl Guides and other locally based youth projects and services.

In terms of the statutory sector, the Youth Work Act 2001 set out a clear role for the Vocational Education Committees (VECs) in relation to youth work. VECs are statutory local education bodies of which there are currently 33, though due to evolve into 16 Education Training Boards as part of systemic changes taking place in Ireland at the moment. With the appointment of VEC Youth Officers, the VECs had a role to play in ensuring that there was adequate provision of youth work programmes and services in coordination with voluntary youth organisations and where they are not being provided. In practice however, the VECs provided statutory support to voluntary organisations and youth services at local level in the delivery and quality of youth work and are not involved in the direct provision of youth work.

In total, there are 32 national youth work organisations in the youth work sector in Ireland funded by DCYA, and they in turn oversee a much larger number of local, community-based projects, services and groups, which deliver services on the ground. The representative body of non-formal youth work is the National Council of Ireland (NYCI). It has a key advocacy and policy influencing role as well as providing a wide range of training in specialist youth work practice and has an important coordinating role in the sector. NYCI is recognised as a social partner in negotiations with the government. NYCI now represents over 54 voluntary youth organisations who collectively provide services for approximately 382,000 young people. The NYCI estimate that there are an estimated 40,145 voluntary youth leaders and approximately 1,397 full-time staff working in these youth organisations and related youth services, including Foróige which was founded in 1952 and is estimated to reach up to 64,000 young people in rural areas. There is also the National Youth Federation which started in 1962 as the National Youth Federation of Catholic Boys’ Clubs, later becoming the National Youth Federation in 1992 to becoming Youth Work Ireland today. Youth Work Ireland works with over 70,000 young people and with over 7,000 volunteers. In addition, there are many more youth work organisations across Ireland representing a thematically diverse sector e.g. arts and culture based organisations, uniformed organisations, faith based, and specialist youth organisations. While many of these are national youth work organisations there is also a high level of regional and local youth work services and projects across Ireland. While many of these services would be affiliated to larger national youth work organisations, there are also a significant number of independent or non-affiliated youth work services and projects which offer bespoke and community-based local youth work responses.

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7 Indecon (2012), *Assessment of the economic value of youth work*. National Youth Council of Ireland.
2 Legislative context and governance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>KEY FACTS</th>
<th>RESPONSE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Legislative framework for youth work</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level of regulation for youth work</td>
<td>National</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Body(ies) with a responsibility for governing youth work</td>
<td>Department of Children and Youth Affairs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2.1 Legal background

In Ireland the Youth Work Act 2001 has its origins in the 1984 Report of the National Youth Policy Committee who proposed that youth work in Ireland should have some form of a legislative basis to support the voluntary nature of Youth Work provision in Ireland. It was not until April 1995 with the publication of the Education White Paper, "Charting our Education Future" that a recommendation was made to introduce a Youth Service Act to define the role of the relevant statutory bodies, (including the Minister and the Education Boards) in the delivery of youth services in Ireland. Following consultation over a period of years, the Youth Work Act, 1997 was published. A change in government also in 1997 witnessed changes in the direction of policy and structure, and much of what the 1997 Act was predicated on was no longer operable. Following a further period of consultation, the Youth Work Bill, 2000 was published in April 2000 and was signed into the statute books in December 2001.

Certain aspects of the Youth Work Act, 2001 have been implemented - namely, the establishment of a National Youth Work Advisory Committee (NYWAC) and the prescription of the National Youth Council of Ireland (NYCI) as the national representative youth work organisation in Ireland. While the Act provides for the appointment of a Youth Work Assessor, this appointment has been made outside the terms of the Act and is located within DCYA.

In terms of the current position, the DCYA are developing an overarching Children's and Young People's Policy Framework. It is intended that a more detailed Youth Policy Framework will be developed as part of this broader policy and that the Youth Work Act, 2001 will be reviewed. It is also anticipated that youth policy developments at European level during Ireland's Presidency of the EU Council of Youth Ministers in 2013 will inform Ireland's national policy for young people.

2.2 Governance

In Ireland the Department for Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA) is the government body responsible for youth affairs. There is some cross-governmental responsibility with the Department for Education and Skills (DES) in so far that the current structure for the VECs falls under DES and as previously mentioned the VECs have a role to play in coordinating, supporting and assessing youth work together with administering local youth work funding. Following the announcement to reduce the number of VECs to 16 Education Training Boards (ETBs), some concerns have been expressed about the ambiguity of the specific role of the VECs in relation to youth work. These have since been addressed by the DCYA with colleagues in the Department of Education and Skills and ETB roles and responsibility with regard to youth work will be confirmed in the new legislation to be presented to Parliament. The Department of Justice and Equality is also involved in youth work, primarily in relation to youth justice and their role in Garda (Police) Youth Diversion Projects. In addition, the Participation Unit of the DCYA is also involved in certain aspects of youth work.
A further key component of the governance of youth work in Ireland is the National Youth Work Advisory Committee (NYWAC), established under the Youth Work Act, 2001. A new committee was appointed at the end of January 2013 for a one year term – this tenure is subject to review.

In terms of funding, the youth work sector received almost €79 million in public funding during 2011, with the main sources being the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (€60.155 million), the HSE (€8.3 million) and the Irish Youth Justice Service (€8.8 million). In Ireland, there is also significant philanthropic funding invested in youth work. These financial contributions mainly come from bodies such as the One Foundation and the Atlantic Philanthropies. There is also the Irish Youth Foundation and whilst small in comparison with spend, the Foundation is active in its contribution to and support for youth work. The One Foundation was co-founded by Declan Ryan who was a director of Ryanair and the main aim of the organisation is to improve the life chances of disadvantaged children and young people in Ireland and Vietnam. It has a particular focus on mental health, integration of minorities and social entrepreneurship. The Atlantic Philanthropies was founded by an Irish-American philanthropist – Chuck Feeney and is focused on ageing, youth, human rights, poverty and health. Philanthropic youth work activity contributed to a broader evidence base and further highlighted the value of youth work in a wide range of contexts. For example, Foróige has developed evidence based programmes through the establishment of its Best Practice Unit that was established in 2009 and funded by Atlantic Philanthropies. It is however understood that funding from the One Foundation will expire in 2013 and Atlantic Philanthropies funding will expire in 2016.

As a result of the current economic downturn, youth work agencies have had their budgets ‘downsized’, which contributes to significant challenges in providing youth work services and ensuring they reach the most needed in Ireland, as well as continuing to provide youth work opportunities to all young people. Concerns have also been raised about the allocation of funding on an ad hoc basis. The lack of a sustained funding means that organisations in the youth sector argue that they are unable to develop medium term plans to build capacity, though given the current economic climate multi-annual funding arrangements are unlikely. Variations in the allocation of funding to youth sector organisations have also created fierce competition between organisations. These are key factors that have contributed to a sector that would benefit from a more strategic, united, unified and collaborative approach to youth work.

3 Policy and programme framework

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>KEY FACTS</th>
<th>RESPONSE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>General level of political commitment to the issue of youth work</td>
<td>Medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dedicated policy / strategy on youth work</td>
<td>Not at the moment – in development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Programmes on the development of youth work</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Net impact of economic crisis on funding for youth work</td>
<td>Negative</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

8 DCYA: 2012
9 Indecon (2012), Assessment of the economic value of youth work. National Youth Council of Ireland.
10 Interview with DCYA and as reported on the SpunOut website – www.spunout.ie
3.1 Policy commitment

Ireland does not currently have a national strategy on youth work. In the past, the National Youth Work Development Plan 2003-2007\textsuperscript{11} aimed to provide youth work with clearer definition and direction. Although formal commitment towards the implementation of the National Youth Work Development Plan 2003-2007 was reinforced in Ireland’s Towards 2016 Partnership Agreement\textsuperscript{12}, as cited in the literature\textsuperscript{13} and noted by interviewees, there appears to have been limited commitment to support the implementation of the plan. Furthermore, there is a view from some interviewees that the 2001 Youth Work Act and the Youth Work Development Plan were passed mainly because of lobbying from youth work sector organisations without any real political backing at the time.

Since the creation of the DCYA in 2011 together with a dedicated senior Minister (Frances Fitzgerald) for Children and Youth Affairs for the first time in Irish political history, there is a real sense that youth work is now considered to be a policy priority. Political commitment to youth work in Ireland is hereby reinforced by the development of an overarching Youth Policy Framework by the DCYA and there is a clear focus on the role of quality youth work and its contribution to enhancing young people’s development, well-being and social inclusion of young people. This is evidenced by the Irish EU Youth Presidency Programme and the policy documents which they are progressing during their Presidency tenure. It is expected that the new Youth Policy Framework, which will be informed by these policy developments, will offer clear definition and direction to national youth policy and provision. There have been some delays in the development of the new Youth Policy Framework due to a number of factors including the development in the first instance of an overarching national Children and Youth Policy Framework as well as other competing priorities such as EU presidency commitments within the Department; however it is expected to be finalised in late 2013.

In addition, there is also the National Quality Standards Framework for Youth Work\textsuperscript{14}. This was published by the DCYA in 2010 with the aim of developing a single, standardised framework that enables youth work organisations to provide and assure quality services to young people. More recently in February 2013, the DCYA launched Standards for Local Volunteer-led Youth Groups, the aim of which is to improve the quality if the programmes and activities for young people and the way in which they are provided. Through the standards, young people will be encouraged and supported to have a say in the planning, design and delivery of their group’s programmes.

The DCYA recently established a Quality Standards Training and Resource Development Task Group to assist the youth work sector in engaging with, and attaining, both sets of standards. A route map for National Quality Standards Initiatives for Youth Work and Youth Activities, recently launched by the DCYA is an innovative resource\textsuperscript{15} which makes available an array of web-based information which is international in scope.

With greater emphasis on outcomes and impact, the DCYA is also working in partnership with the Centre for Effective Services (CES) who recently commissioned

\textsuperscript{13} See for example, Leahy and Burgess (2010; pg. 119); Christie, A. (2005)
\textsuperscript{15} See: http://www.effective-services.org/ces-projects/National-Quality-Standards-Framework
the Evidence for Policy and Practice Information and Co-ordinating Centre (EPPI-Centre) at the Institute of Education in London (on behalf of the DCYA) to undertake a systematic mapping of the research literature on youth work. The main aim is to enhance linkages with evidence-informed practice to ensure that youth work and related practice and provision in Ireland is of high quality and is focused on achieving optimal outcomes for young people. The review provides a unique resource for investigating the content of youth work, how it is delivered and identifies the empirical research evidence on the impact of youth work on the lives of children and young people aged 10-24 years old. Identifying an evidence-base for the youth work sector is considered to be critical in developing and contributing to a more informed understanding of the value of youth work and its positive impact on children and young people. As such, it is intended that the research findings of the review will contribute towards the development of an evidence-informed Youth Policy Framework being developed by the DCYA as referred to above.

In addition, NYCI commissioned a study on the economic value of youth work in Ireland\textsuperscript{16}. Key findings from this study show that for every €1 the State invests in youth work, it saves €2.22 in the long run. As previously mentioned Foróige’s Best Practice Unit (BPU) has also contributed towards developing and delivering outcomes focused, evidence based resources which facilitate the development of staff, volunteers and young people. The BPU has commissioned a number of studies to explore the impact of youth work in an Irish context - examples include the Volunteer-Led Youth Work Study and the Youth Citizenship Research. With a focus on outcomes and evidence, the BPU also offers training to support staff develop programmes that meet the needs of young people and to develop practical skills and tools to evaluate their work in both a qualitative and quantitative way.

To conclude this section, in summary there is a real sense that the DCYA is now proactive rather than reactive – as was the case in the past, though there is a fear within the sector that a focus on early intervention is seen primarily as early years rather than across the life of a child or young person which would include youth work. Of course it is difficult here to argue against a focus on early intervention particularly in terms of child protection.

### 3.2 Policies and programmes to develop youth work

Although there is no youth work strategy currently in place in Ireland, as previously mentioned the Youth Work Policy Framework is in development. With regard to the policies and programmes to develop youth work, DCYA inherited a number of funding schemes with some concerns that there were and is, a wide range of funded activity targeting the same target groups – largely magnified in urban areas with a missing focus on the developmental aspects of youth work and on those young people who are most excluded.

There are however a wide range of programmes in Ireland to develop youth work to support young people’s development, well-being and social inclusion. In particular, the DCYA fund a number of programmes and initiatives. As illustrated in Table 3.1 below, these figures represent the total funding nationally. Here the DCYA provide grants for special out-of-school projects for disadvantaged young people with priority given to young homeless people, young substance abusers and young travellers. The scheme is currently administered by the VECs on behalf of the Department. In addition, there is also the Young People’s Facilities and Services Fund established in 1998 to assist in the development of preventative strategies/initiatives through the development of

\textsuperscript{16}Indecon (2012), \textit{Assessment of the economic value of youth work}. National Youth Council of Ireland.
youth facilities and services in disadvantaged areas where drug problems exist or has the potential to develop. Funding allocated under this initiative has supported in the region of 500 projects that include for example, funding purpose built youth centres, outreach and sports development workers.

There is also the Youth Service Grant Scheme that provides funding on an annual basis to the national and major regional voluntary youth organisations aimed at the personal and social education of young people. The DCYA also provide resources for the development of Youth Information Centres and provides a Local Youth Club Grant Scheme. This latter scheme is also delivered through the VECs and is aimed at supporting youth work activities at a local level. Some 1,600 youth groups with almost 90,000 members are supported through this Scheme. It should however be noted that initiatives provided through DYCA are not accepting new applications for funding due to budgetary constraints. The DCYA are focusing its efforts on consolidating and preserving existing provision as far as possible.

Table 3.1 below provides a breakdown of the DCYA Youth Affairs Unit funds from 2008-2012.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Programme</th>
<th>2008 (in millions)</th>
<th>2009 (in millions)</th>
<th>2010 (in millions)</th>
<th>2011 (in millions)</th>
<th>2012 (in millions)</th>
<th>Total (in millions)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Special Projects for Youth Scheme</td>
<td>€21.381</td>
<td>€19.976</td>
<td>€19.476</td>
<td>€18.156</td>
<td>€17.042</td>
<td>€96.031</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth Information Centres</td>
<td>€2.167</td>
<td>€2.046</td>
<td>€2.005</td>
<td>€1.862</td>
<td>€1.425</td>
<td>€9.505</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth Service Grant Scheme</td>
<td>€13.602</td>
<td>€12.573</td>
<td>€12.327</td>
<td>€11.444</td>
<td>€11.051</td>
<td>€60.997</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young Peoples Facilities &amp; Services Fund 1</td>
<td>€8.512</td>
<td>€8.631</td>
<td>€7.859</td>
<td>€7.193</td>
<td>€6.725</td>
<td>€38.920</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young Peoples Facilities &amp; Services Fund 2</td>
<td>€15.950</td>
<td>€17.360</td>
<td>€17.405</td>
<td>€15.562</td>
<td>€14.607</td>
<td>€80.884</td>
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<tr>
<td>Local Youth Club Grant Scheme</td>
<td>€1.800</td>
<td>€1.150</td>
<td>€1.300</td>
<td>€1.035</td>
<td>€1.035</td>
<td>€6.320</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local Drugs Task Force Scheme</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>€1.433</td>
<td>€1.340</td>
<td>€2.773</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gaisce</td>
<td>€0.956</td>
<td>€0.883</td>
<td>€0.819</td>
<td>€0.738</td>
<td>€0.690</td>
<td>€4.086</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leargas</td>
<td>€0.639</td>
<td>€0.597</td>
<td>€0.585</td>
<td>€0.527</td>
<td>€0.492</td>
<td>€2.840</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Programmes</td>
<td>€3.167</td>
<td>€2.259</td>
<td>€2.227</td>
<td>€2.205</td>
<td>€2.399</td>
<td>€12.257</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>€68.174</td>
<td>€65.475</td>
<td>€64.003</td>
<td>€60.155</td>
<td>€56.806</td>
<td>€314.613</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: DCYA: 2012

The DCYA also provide funding for two other specific programmes. These include the National Youth Arts Programme that is supported in partnerships with the Arts Council and the National Youth Council of Ireland. It aims at realising the potential of young people in Ireland through arts practice and developing policies and activities at local, regional and national levels. Finally, the DCYA together with the HSE and the National Youth Council of Ireland provide the National Youth Health Programme. This aims to
provide a broad-based, flexible health promotion/education support and training services to youth organisations and to those working with young people in non-formal education settings. The details of these programmes are discussed in more detail below.

Reflecting on the impact of the recession, a recent Indecon study\(^{17}\) that assessed the economic value of youth work in Ireland reports that employment rates among persons aged 15 to 19 years who are in the labour force are substantially below those across all other age groups and the national average, and this is more pronounced among males compared with females. In addition, youth unemployment rates have increased at a faster pace than overall unemployment rates since the onset of the recession. Between 2006 and 2011, the number of unemployed young people rose by 29%. The incidence of unemployment is markedly greater among young people. In particular, among persons aged between 15 and 19 who are in the labour force, almost half (48.4%) were unemployed in the 2nd quarter of 2012. The unemployment rate among 20 to 24 year olds was 29%, compared to a national unemployment rate of 14.7%. Unemployment among young people in Ireland is also above the EU average.

There is also the Youthreach programme that is an integral part of the national programme of second-chance education and training in Ireland, primarily aimed at unemployed young early school leavers aged 15-20. While this programme is not regarded as youth work, the educational approaches employed are often informed by specific youth work methodologies. Under the 2012 Budget, allowances to 16 and 17 year olds in Youthreach and FAS schemes were reduced to €40 per week from €76 and €95 respectively. As reported by the NYCI (2011), it is expected that such reduction will have a largely negative impact for many young people\(^{18}\).

Through the DCYA and the Irish Youth Justice Service, there are the Garda Youth Diversion Projects\(^{19}\). These are locally based prevention activities which work with children and young people and aim to prevent young people’s unlawful behaviour or actions. As reported in the Indecon (2012) study, the total direct public funding costs for Garda Youth Diversion Projects during 2011 was €8.85 million or €13.27 million after adjusting to reflect the shadow cost of public funds and the nominal cost of state funding for health related youth work programmes in 2011 was €33.3 million. In addition, the nominal cost of welfare related youth work programmes in 2011 was €30.5 million.

### 4 Youth workers: training, status, population and profile

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>KEY FACTS</strong></th>
<th><strong>RESPONSE</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Minimum qualifications standards for youth workers</td>
<td>Employed/paid staff members are generally required to hold a professional qualification normally to degree level. There is no minimum</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^{17}\) Indecon (2012), *Assessment of the economic value of youth work in Ireland*. National Youth Council of Ireland.


**KEY FACTS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RESPONSE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>qualification standard for youth work volunteers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth worker as a recognised profession / occupation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Availability of formal, dedicated qualifications for youth workers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education background of the majority of youth workers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of youth workers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trend in the overall number of youth workers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 4.1 Training and qualifications

In Ireland there are no minimum qualification standards for youth workers. Some, though not all employers now require new paid recruits to hold a professional degree endorsed by the North-South Education and Training Standards Committee for Youth Work\(^{20}\). The Committee was established with a focus on the professional status of youth work and youth workers across Ireland, though it should be noted that Ireland has not stated that youth work is an all degree profession. In recent years the number of professionally endorsed third level university courses has increased considerably both in terms of the number of qualifications on offer and the number of institutions offering such provision\(^{21}\).

In relation to volunteers/unpaid youth workers, there are no minimum qualification standards requirements. All volunteers undergo a thorough Garda vetting process\(^{22}\) in order to be able to volunteer in the youth sector as do all paid youth workers. Many of the national youth organisations provide formal and non-formal training and qualification opportunities for paid/volunteers/unpaid youth workers in Ireland.

In terms of the profile of volunteers, there is currently no available information in relation to the qualification profile of volunteers working in the sector and in general it is believed that volunteers come from a variety of backgrounds. The Irish Research Council Researcher Development Initiative, co-funded by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs and Department of Environment, Community and Local Government, has commissioned the National University of Ireland, Maynooth and University College, Cork to carry out Quantitative and Qualitative Study of Volunteer-led Youth Work in Ireland. This study is examining the structure of volunteer led youth work in Ireland and factors affecting volunteerism. Results should be available in late 2013.

In the absence of a professional body for youth work in Ireland, NYCI recognise the need to carry out a mapping exercise of the workforce to understand more clearly the

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\(^{20}\) See: http://www.ycni.org/youth_work_training/ns_educ_trg.html


\(^{22}\) See: http://www.volunteer.ie/i-want-to-volunteer/garda-vetting
profile of volunteers working in the sector. For example, NYCI provide training on a national, regional and local basis and through their Child Protection Programme deliver a range of training programmes to the youth work sector from basic awareness, designated persons training to a new level 8 Certificate with NUI Maynooth.

4.2 Status of youth worker profession

In Ireland, the National Youth Work Development Plan acknowledged that youth work is a profession. In recent years the continued drive towards the professionalisation of the sector is evidenced by the increasing number of third level and professional qualifications now available and the growing number of those involved in youth work having undergone professional education and training. However, it is argued that lively debates still prevail in the area of youth work with regard to the merits and de-merits of professionalisation, indeed NYCI argue that one of the biggest challenges facing youth workers in Ireland is in relation to the recognition of youth work as a profession and recognition of youth workers as professionals.

As one interviewee asserts, whilst youth work can be described as a profession in Ireland, it is important to position youth work in the context of what a profession is by definition. By doing so there is a need to be clear about what youth work commits to in terms of an occupation that rests on values and trust that forms the basis of the profession/community it engages. Indeed one of the key strengths of youth work in Ireland is that it is based on a real sense of trust and partnership.

There was a clear view from most interviewees that broader professional groups, in particular teachers and health professionals look towards youth work to support them in problematic areas – for example to help with individuals from the most socially and economically disadvantaged backgrounds.

4.3 Youth worker population

Whilst there was a significant growth in the number of volunteers and paid youth workers over the past 10 years, in more recent years, there has been a decline in the number of paid staff – this is largely as a result of funding cuts.

As indicated above, there are some 30 Youth Officers working with the VECs who are responsible for the coordination and administration of youth worker funding at local levels – though as previously mentioned the VECs are in the process of moving to 16 ETBs. Within this context the allocation of VEC Youth Officers will be reviewed to ensure maximum coverage is achieved in the support of local quality youth work provision.

In terms of the number of youth work organisations, the same number of youth organisation funded under the Youth Service Grant Scheme pre-recession are still being funded by DCYA. As stated in the Indecon (2012) study, the vast majority of youth work organisations provide recreational, arts and sports-related activities, while over half are engaged in activities which are focussed on welfare and well-being. Issue-based activities form an important focus for youth work organisations, many of
which deal specifically with addressing challenges such as substance and alcohol misuse.

4.4 Profile of youth workers

As indicated above there are 1,397 paid FTE youth workers in Ireland and 40,145 volunteers\textsuperscript{27}, there is however little available data in relation to the profile of youth workers in Ireland. Those working on a voluntary and paid basis come from a variety of backgrounds and there is no anecdotal evidence to suggest any patterns are emerging or exist in terms of the previous sectors youth workers come from.

A number of key challenges youth workers face in Ireland were reported by the interviewees. Lack of funding was highlighted as the key challenge considered also to be at the root of other significant challenges youth workers face. These include the increasingly complex social issues young people face (including for example issues of bullying, special education needs, meeting cultural needs) and the need to ensure staff are suitably trained with sufficient resources in place to best meet the needs of young people. Here it is argued that that the ‘most valuable’ aspect of a youth work intervention can be the opportunity to ‘engage in a supportive one-to-one relationship based on mutual respect\textsuperscript{28}’. Though the case for incorporating ‘one-to-one’ time into youth work programmes is considered to be compelling, recent cuts to funding mean that opportunities for one-to-one time/targeted intervention is restricted. With growing demand for youth work services as families look towards the youth sector to provide social/recreational activities for their children there is a concern that though the demand is increasing, resources to provide them are declining.

A further challenge is associated with engaging with young people and technology; here it is argued that if youth workers are going to engage with young people effectively then they need to possess a high level of competence in new communication arenas\textsuperscript{29}.

5 The role and value of youth work

5.1 Education and training

As part of Indecon’s research, it is reported that a large majority of youth work organisations attach significant levels of importance to youth work helping young people to gain education and training qualifications. Indeed many organisations provide specific education opportunities, for example stay-in-school programmes or target early school leaving as a specific problem. In addition, a number of organisations offer programmes which seek to divert young people from committing crimes or engaging in anti-social behaviour.

\textsuperscript{27} Indecon (2012), Assessment of the economic value of youth work in Ireland. National Youth Council of Ireland.


\textsuperscript{29} Sefton-Green (1999), \textit{Young people, creativity and new technologies}. London: Routledge.

Exchange House\(^{30}\) offers young traveller children with a whole range of education related programmes. These include a Stay-In-School Programme, After-School Projects that provide a quiet space for homework and assist young people in completing homework, engage parents in children’s education and provide library and computer facilities to young people.

The Youthreach programme\(^{31}\) in Ireland is directed at unemployed, young early school leavers in Ireland aged between 15-20 years of age. Youthreach offers a flexible and dynamic programme of integrated general education, vocational training and work experience. Learners set personal and educational goals that are aimed at increasing their self-esteem, skills, knowledge and employability. Achievements are certified by FETAC set within Ireland’s National Qualification Framework. Essential course elements include personal and social development, vocational skills and communication skills.

There is also the Young Social Innovators Initiative\(^{32}\) that is a youth-led, team-based, action focused programme. The programme encourages, young people to actively take part in civic action whether through volunteerism, community service, service-learning, citizenship education, social entrepreneurship and innovation. Working in teams of 5-25 young people identify a social issue of concern to them and/or their community or further afield, explore it and come up with innovative actions and responses which they put into practice. It is heralded for its success in promoting and leading the way in education for social innovation in Ireland. It links to the Junior Certificate curricula in subjects such as Social, Physical and Health Education, religious education, home economics and others. It aims to develop skills and knowledge in relation to citizenship, human rights, development, environmental protection and health and social enterprise education for example.

The Gaisce initiative\(^{33}\) is presented below as an example of young people involved in volunteering opportunities. The programme is however considered to be a self-directed personal development programme for young people in the non-formal Education sector and serves as a mentoring programme for young people in transition from school to further or higher education, training or employment opportunities.

Localise\(^{34}\) is a youth and community development organisation that works alongside schools, universities and community services to develop active citizens and professionals who can make positive contributions to their communities. In the work Localise undertake with schools, young people participate in range of activities including fundraising and care in the community that link to key subjects of the junior particularly in the area of civic, social and political education.

BeLonG To also runs a national LGBT Youth Leadership training programme where by young people are trained and supported by youth workers to deliver youth groups. This programme has been running for a decade now and has in addition supported youth leaders into youth work college courses. In addition, Foróige’s Albert Schweitzer’s Leadership for Life programme supports the development of young people as leaders through a year-long programme focused on leadership skills, individual

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\(^{30}\) See: http://www.exchangehouse.ie/services.php

\(^{31}\) See: http://www.youthreach.ie/

\(^{32}\) See: http://www.youngsocialinnovators.ie/index.php/about/

\(^{33}\) See: http://www.gaisce.ie/default.aspx

\(^{34}\) See: http://www.localise.ie/
leadership goals, research skills, team projects and culminates in an individual community action project. The programme leads to the Foundation Certificate in Youth Leadership and Community Action by NUI Galway.

5.2 Employment and entrepreneurship

Given high rates of youth unemployment in Ireland there has been a significant growth in the provision of youth work in the context of improving employment and entrepreneurship opportunities for young people in Ireland with a considerable drive to foster employability amongst young people.

- For example, Foróige offer the Network for Teaching Entrepreneurship (NFTE) programme\(^\text{35}\) which provides opportunities for young people from low-income communities to develop their business, academic and life skills. Young people take part in the programme to learn new skills and enhance their entrepreneurial flair. It operates both in and out of school programmes and is delivered primarily in schools and youth centres by teachers and youth workers and is open to young who are between 13-18 years of age. Young people who complete the programme attend the Youth Entrepreneurship Awards\(^\text{36}\).

5.3 Health and well-being

As reported in research published by the Irish Medical Journal in August 2012, Ireland has the fourth highest youth suicide rate in the EU. The research shows a dramatic increase in the number of deaths by suicide in Irish teens under the age of 17 – showing a 16% increase in the suicide rate amongst young people in 2003 to 2008 - when compared with 1993 to 1998. As such, the contribution of youth work to health and well-being provides an important focus on mental health services and support to all young people. Headstrong\(^\text{37}\) is the National Centre for Youth Mental Health and runs a programme called ‘Jigsaw’ that aims to bring community services and support together to support young people and better meet their mental health needs.

- In addition, BeLonG To also plays a major role in the youth sector in promoting mental health and well-being. Since 2007, the HSE's National Office for Suicide Prevention have identified LGBT people as an at risk group in the National Strategy for Action on Suicide Prevention and has funded BeLonG To to develop designated LGBT youth groups. These youth groups provide vital mental health support to LGBT young people in 18 locations across Ireland. In addition BeLonG To runs a designated LGBT youth mental health programme that focuses on training youth workers and building resilience amongst LGBT young people. In 2011 an evaluation of BeLonG To’s National Network Programme was independently evaluated by NUI Galway on behalf of the HSE. The evaluation found the programme to be highly effective and that youth groups had a positive mental health impact on LGBT young people.

- In recent years a number of organisations have also extended their services to address broader health concerns associated with physical and sexual health for example. SpunOut\(^\text{38}\) is an independent youth led national charity in Ireland working to support young people between 16 and 25

See:

http://www.foroige.ie/ee/index.php/what_we_do/network_for_teaching_entrepreneurship

See: http://www.youngentrepreneur.ie/

See: http://www.headstrong.ie/content/journey-so-far-0

See: http://www.spunout.ie/
years of age. It provides an interactive online community for young people to access health and lifestyle information ranging from matters relating to alcohol and drugs, disability, personal safety, mental health, sexual health and young parents and pregnancy.

- Foróige also runs a personal development and sex education programme aimed at equipping young people with the skills, knowledge and confidence to develop healthy relationships and delay the onset of early sexual activity. As part of this, Foróige’s has developed the REAL U manual (Relationships Explored and Life Uncovered) has been developed as a way of exploring a number of relevant topics with young people including puberty, body image, reproduction, sexuality, contraception, sexually transmitted infections, relationships, boundaries and emotional well-being. It is designed to be used with young people aged 12-18 years in a group work setting. The resource facilitates the development of skills in relation to decision making and communication, to promote positive well-being and confidence in relationships.

- On a broader scale, the NYCI National Youth Health Programme facilitates youth organisations and youth serving agencies to promote and inform healthy lifestyle behaviour. It is a partnership approach between the National Youth Council, the Health Service Executive and the DCYA. The aim of the programme is to provide a broad based, flexible health promotion, support and training service to youth organisations and works to ensure that young persons’ health is on the policy agenda. As part of the programme training opportunities are available in areas related to bullying, mental health, suicide intervention, sexual health for example. As part of the project materials are also available to support young people in healthy eating, mental health or giving up smoking.

5.4 Participation

In Ireland, the 2009 Programme for Government set out a commitment to examine the proposal to extend voting rights to young people aged 16 and 17 years. This remains subject to constitutional change. As a way of increasing young people’s participation to community and political life a number of youth work initiatives/programmes have been established.

- For example, NYCI Vote@16 Campaign strongly asserts that the age at which an individual can vote should be reduced from 18 to 16 years of age in local and European Parliament elections. As part of the Vote@16 Campaign a series of measures have been implemented to facilitate a greater voter turnout, particularly among young people. For example NYCI hosted the Vote@16 youth conference on February 11th, 2012 - focusing on democracy and how young Irish people can become active citizens. More recently, In January 2013, NYCI provided a written submission to the Convention on the Constitution (focused on extending the voting age to 17). Amongst other things, the NYCI’s submission makes the case for reducing the vote to 16, promotes political participation and makes a strong case for putting youth issues on the political agenda.

- In Ireland there is also Dáil na nÓg which has been established as the National Youth Parliament of Ireland for people aged 12-18 years. It is led

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39 See: http://www.youthhealth.ie
41 See: http://www.voteat16.ie/
42 See: http://www.dailinanog.ie/2006/site/home.php
by the DCYA and serves to provide young people from around the country with the opportunity to represent the views of those under the voting age of 18 at a national level, and to work for changes to improve the lives of young people in Ireland. Topical issues include exam pressures, body image, the cost of education, young people having a say in education, bullying, depression and suicide, exercise and sport, sexual health, road safety and youth facilities for example.

- Youth Work Ireland also runs ‘Voices of Youth’\(^{43}\). This initiative is designed to encourage young people to have their say about youth issues in the media. ‘Voices of youth’ is run by a group of young people who involve young people from all over Ireland between 14-21 years of age. ‘Voices of Youth’ recently organised and facilitated an event to provide young people with the opportunity to learn about their rights and to have a say on matters that will affect them that may be related to mental health, children’s rights, drug awareness or online piracy for example.

### 5.5 Voluntary activities / volunteering

Volunteering has long been recognised for its significant contribution to society and the influential role that it can play in the creation of social capital, a more inclusive society, a better functioning democracy, more active citizens and an improved sense of community in Ireland\(^{44}\). In a recent report published by NYCI\(^{45}\) they stress their active commitment to promoting and supporting volunteering amongst young people and emphasise its work to promote, sustain and develop volunteering as being fundamental to society and a worthwhile activity for young people to engage in. For example Youth Work Ireland Volunteer Achievement Awards were introduced in 1999 to recognise the contribution made by volunteers across Ireland to the lives of young people.

- The Gaisce Awards\(^{46}\) mentioned above also provides opportunities for young people to engage in volunteering activities. As reported in the NYCI Lending a Hand report on young people and volunteering there was some criticism that the structure of the award criteria lacked flexibility. The idea of the award is to encourage and support young people through the achievement of personal challenges. It is open to young people between 15 and 25 years of age and encourages them to get involved in their community, set personal goals for themselves in terms of physical recreation and personal skill and learn how to become a member of a team.

- There is also the ‘The Transition Year Programme’ is an optional, one-year, standalone, full-time programme offered in 75% of second-level schools in Ireland. Aimed at those in the 15–16 age groups, the programme has a strong focus on personal and social development and on education for active citizenship. As part of this programme, many young people engage in volunteering and community related activities. A number of organisations provide opportunities for the Transition Year Programme. For example, Localise\(^{47}\) offer a programme that provides young people with an introduction into volunteering and offers accredited learning opportunities.

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\(^{43}\) See: http://voicesofyouth.wordpress.com/


\(^{45}\) See: http://www.youth.ie/sites/youth.ie/files/Lending-a-Hand_Young-People-and-Volunteering.pdf

\(^{46}\) See: http://www.gaisce.ie/default.aspx

\(^{47}\) Open citation of ref: 31
It should however be noted that the Transition Year Programme has been subject to criticism in recent years in particular because of its high costs (the estimated annual cost is €104.6 million\(^48\)).

5.6 Social inclusion

The contribution of youth work to social inclusion is far reaching in so far that there are a wide range of activities and services to help marginalised young people and those at risk of social exclusion, homelessness, substance misuse or those who have dropped out of education.

- The Galway Diocesan Youth Services runs the Tithe na nÓg project for young people (under 25 years) who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. The project is in line with the national strategy for Homeless services ‘The Way Home 2008-2013’. In addition, Business in the Community, Ireland run the Ready for Work programme aimed at providing work experiences and guidance to homeless and marginalised people.

- Ballymun Youth Action Project (BYAP) is a community-based response to drug and alcohol abuse providing a range of services to those with substance misuse problems and those indirectly affected by addiction. Services include one-one counselling, family support and complementary therapies. In addition BYAP run a number of outreach programmes and a prison programme providing support to young people in custodial care affected by drug abuse.

- BeLonG To\(^49\) offer a range of services and programmes to support all young people in Ireland who may be gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender (LGBT). For example, BeLonG To provides services to young people who are LGBT to address concerns about drug/alcohol use and to young people who may suffer from anxiety, depression or more serious mental health problems. BeLonG To also run the Asylum Seekers and Refugees project that creates a space for young people who may be LGTB to get support from youth workers and find out more information about other relevant support services. BeLonG To also offer support to parents of young people who may be LGBT. It has 13 groups across 14 different counties in Ireland and offer services and support in relation to mental health, sexual health, physical health and coming out.

- More broadly, NYCI’s Intercultural Programme seeks to promote and encourage an intercultural and anti-racist approach as a sustainable feature of youth work in Ireland. The programme aims to promote equality of opportunity, interaction, understanding, respect and integration between different cultures, ethnic and religious groups.

There are also a number of youth work activities, primarily in partnership with the Irish Youth Justice Service to support young people at risk of offending behaviour and to support young offenders with their integration into society. Some examples are provided below.

- In supporting young offenders in their transition from custodial care back into the community, a number of projects exist at national and local levels. For example, Le Chéile is a nationwide project working in partnership with the Young Persons’ Probation division of the Probation Service providing mentoring for young people in conflict with the law. Le Chéile recruits,

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\(^{49}\) See: http://www.belongto.org
trains and supports volunteers from the community to act as mentors to young people who are under the supervision of the Probation Service.

5.7 Youth and the world

Youth work in this context of global concerns primarily focus on activities that promote awareness among young people and aim to encourage young people to think critically about the links between personal, local and global issues. The main area of focus tends to be on issues of human rights, social justice and intercultural awareness.

- Through the work of ECO-UNESCO\(^{50}\), there is also an important focus on environmental issues. In summary, ECO-UNESCO is Ireland’s Environmental Education and Youth Organisation affiliated to the World Federation of UNESCO Clubs, Centres and Associations (WFUCA). It was founded in 1986 and its main mission is to promote the personal development of young people and raise environmental awareness through practical environmental projects.

- More broadly there are a number of projects/programmes related to personal, local and global issues. For example, a project carried out in Co. Cork as part of the Young Social Innovators Initiative focused on heightening awareness about female genital mutilation and the physical and mental problems faced by women in Africa\(^{51}\). Léargas\(^{52}\) as a not-for-profit organisation runs a range of European, bilateral and international programmes to support the development of intercultural awareness. For example, the Causeway project\(^{53}\) is a British-Irish exchange programme that aims to strengthen and improve relationships between young people in Britain and Ireland.

- In addition, Foróige’s Big Brother Big Sister (BBBS) programme\(^{54}\) established in 2001 is an internationally recognised youth mentoring programme that aims to form supportive friendships for young people inspiring them to brighter futures. BBBS is available in 14 counties nationally. In 2010, 1,622 young people were involved in the BBBS programme in Ireland, this rose to 2,324 young people in 2011.

5.8 Creativity and culture

It is possible to identify a clear tendency in how youth work is seen as a contribution in the field of creativity and culture. As illustrated below national organisations as part of their repertoire offer programmes and initiatives in the area of creativity and culture.

- In addition, many local services offer arts and culture provision, through Irish Language organisations such as Feachtas and Ogras. Both Feachtas and Ogras are Irish language youth organisations that create opportunities either through youth clubs or events through the medium of Irish to help with the personal and social development of young people.

- In addition, there are many services and programmes offered by youth organisations that have a focus on social interaction to encourage intercultural dialogue through the creative expression of culture and art. For example, the Irish Youth Music Awards\(^{55}\) is a collaborative venue

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\(^{50}\) See: http://www.ecounesco.ie/

\(^{51}\) See: http://www.youngsocialinnovators.ie/index.php/projects/view/the_cruellest_cut

\(^{52}\) See: http://www.leargas.ie/index.php

\(^{53}\) See: http://www.leargas.ie/programmeme_main.php?prog_code=7017

\(^{54}\) See: http://www.foroige.ie/our-work/big-brother-big-sister/about-big-brother-big-sister

\(^{55}\) See: http://www.imro.ie/about-imro/
between Youth Work Ireland, Garageland, City of Dublin Youth Service Board and Youth Action Northern Ireland, to encourage young people all over Ireland in their creative efforts. The initiative brings together some of Ireland’s top music industry personnel directly into contact with young musicians. Youth Work Ireland also run the Youth Factor programme designed to build confidence and encourage social interaction. The programme creates an opportunity for young people to demonstrate their talents and interests through all different forms of dance, songs, music and performance.

- The National Association for Youth Drama (NAYD) is a development organisation for youth theatre and youth drama in Ireland. NAYD supports youth drama in practice and policy, and supports the sustained development of youth theatres in Ireland. With over 50 youth theatres across the country, NAYD also have a key role to play in developing Drama in Education, and works closely with the formal and non-formal education sector. In addition, the Young Irish Film Makers is a digital film training and production centre where young people aged 13 to 20 years participate in practical training programmes to work with professional digital equipment to make films, particularly feature length films. Specifically, Young Irish Film Makers works with youth and community groups to engage people who might not be responsive to traditional learning structures, while putting very real technology skills and opportunities for creative expression into their hands. A specially designed programme is also available to youth workers to support them develop the skills necessary to train their members how to make a film.

- More broadly, the Youth Arts Programme is an NYCI initiative funded primarily by the Arts Council with support from the Department for Children and Youth Affairs and is dedicated to the development and advancement of youth arts in Ireland. It aims specifically to realise the potential of young people through arts practice in the youth service and to develop appropriate policies and activities at local, regional and national level. As part of the Youth Arts programme, the Artist in Youth Work Scheme has been established in order to provide young people with the opportunity to work with and learn from practitioners of excellence in their field.

6 Outcomes and impact of youth work

6.1 Target and reach

6.1.1 Target groups

In Ireland, youth work is for all young people, though for some young people, such as the young unemployed, young people dependent on social welfare/unemployment assistance, those at risk of homelessness, social isolation, drug/substance abuse and those that are not in education, training or employment (NEET), some targeted support is available.

56 See: http://nayd.ie/home/show/about
57 See: http://yifm.com/outreach/
58 See: http://www.youtharts.ie/
59 See: http://www.youtharts.ie/content/artist-youth-work-scheme
Table 6.1 provides a brief description of the three programmes in receipt of the most DCYA funding (as extracted from Table 3.1)

Table 6.1  
Programme description of programmes in most receipt of DCYA funding

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Programme</th>
<th>Funding allocated between 2008-2012 in millions</th>
<th>Programme description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Special Projects for Youth Scheme</td>
<td>€96.031</td>
<td>Priority given to projects aimed at young homeless people, young substance abusers and young travellers. Projects to address the needs of young people who are disadvantaged due to high youth population, youth unemployment, dependence on social welfare/unemployment assistance, social isolation, drug/substance abuse, homelessness, problems of juvenile crime, vandalism and truancy, failure or non-existence of mainline youth services, inadequate take-up of ordinary educational opportunities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth Service Grant Scheme</td>
<td>€60.997</td>
<td>Intended to ensure the emergence, promotion, growth and development of youth organisations with distinctive philosophies and programmes aimed at the personal and social education of all young people.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young Peoples Facilities &amp; Services Fund 2</td>
<td>€80.884</td>
<td>The target group for the Fund are 10-21 year olds who are marginalised through a combination of risk factors relating to family background, environmental circumstances, educational disadvantage, involvement in crime and/or drugs, etc.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: DCYA: 2012

As the evidence shows, among persons aged between 15 and 19 who are in the labour force, almost half (48.4%) were unemployed in the 2nd quarter of 2012. The unemployment rate among 20 to 24 year olds was 29%, compared to a national unemployment rate of 14.7%. The research also shows that male unemployment is much higher than female unemployment across all age categories, with the widest disparity between male and female unemployment levels occurring in the 20-24 year age group.

In terms of the NEET group, the Indecon (2012) study reports that Ireland had the 4th highest number of NEETs in 2011, 18.4% in Ireland compared to an average of 12.9% in Europe. In trying to support the needs of the NEET group and indeed other young people accessing youth work provision, interviewees noted that youth work often over-extends itself in trying to respond to a multitude of issues, sometimes making overly ambitious claims to what it can realistically achieve within the current structure and within current funding allocations.

There is a view that the large national youth work organisations in Ireland as well as providing youth work programmes and services for all young people (universal or open access) primarily target similar target groups – for example, young unemployed, those

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61 Ibid.
that are not in education, training or employment (NEET), with small, more specialised youth work organisations aimed at providing more specialised, focus support to young people, such as LGTB and young travellers.

In terms of sectoral differences and trends as indicated earlier many sectors have changed in orientation in recent years in response to societal changes and the changing needs of young people today. For example, faith based youth work has changed in terms of their reorientation in order to reflect the spiritual diversity of Irish society. In the health sector, there is an increased focus on physical health and dealing with issues of obesity and anorexia that builds on a previous focus on mental health and sexual health.

The way in which young people access youth work is also worth considering. As reported by Foróige, there has been a decline in the number of young people visiting traditional youth information centres for example, choosing to access information online, through social media or via other spaces such as Youth Cafes. With growing emphasis on the participation of young people in Irish democracy/society, there is an increased focus on citizenship and participation. Youth organisations are also responding to the need for a greater focus on employability and entrepreneurship at a time of high youth unemployment in Ireland.

6.1.2 Reach

Indecon’s (2012) independent analysis found that the sector is substantial in scale and reach, with almost 383,000 young people benefiting from a wide range of programmes and services – this represents 43.3% of the total youth population aged between 10 and 24 in Ireland.

Despite its greatest achievements, there is a shared view from the interviewees that the youth sector has not done sufficiently well in meeting the needs of those most excluded – for example, the poorest, young people with disabilities, young immigrants/new communities and those from troublesome backgrounds. This is largely as a consequence of limited resources and funding but also because the current systemic nature of the youth sector in Ireland means that smaller, more specialised youth work organisations find it difficult to compete (for accessing funding) with the larger/national youth work organisations that tend to be more generic in the groups they target and reach.

With more targeted funding, geographically isolated young people, those that are out of school (rural particularly), young immigrants – especially those in hostel accommodation, young people with special education needs and young people in the care system could benefit more.

In Ireland there has been considerable success in reaching and supporting the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community (LGBT). For example, in 2003 BeLonG To reporting that 56 young people benefited from their support/services. By 2012, this number increased to approximately 3,000 young people.

6.2 Outcomes and impact

The already mentioned Indecon (2012) study on the economic value of youth work presents the findings from a review of international and national research on the experience and economic impact of youth work. More specifically, the literature review provides some specific evidence based on studies carried out in Ireland. The main impact of youth work based on the research findings includes reductions in criminal

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62 Ibid.
63 See: http://www.belongto.org/pro/default.aspx
activity and anti-social behaviour, increased numbers of young people in education, employment or training and reductions in substance abuse. Significantly, Aked et al (2009) carried out a study on the return on investments into early intervention programmes for young people who are not in education, employment or training, obesity, crime, teenage births, substance misuse, mental health problems, domestic violence, child abuse and neglect. The report estimates that the costs associated with providing appropriate support to the aforementioned areas would be £191 billion over the ten-year period from 2010 to 2020. The savings arising as a result of these programmes over the same period are estimated at £460 billion. As the Indecon study report, this leads to an overall estimated return of £269 billion.

Less tangible outcomes reported include improved confidence and self-esteem, decision-making abilities, personal development and meeting new people.

The report estimates that the overall net economic value of youth work (that includes for example volunteering, justice, health and welfare-related benefits) over a 10-year time horizon is €2.2 billion in present value terms. If one assumes on a hypothetical basis that 2011 funding streams were maintained, the cost to the State of sustaining youth sector funding over the same period would be of the order of just under €1 billion in present value terms. Relating the present value of the estimated benefits of youth programmes with the present value of Exchequer funding over a 10-year period indicates an overall net economic return arising from these quantified aspects of youth work of €1.21 billion, or a Benefit-Cost Ratio (BCR) of 2.22:1. This is equivalent to indicating that the benefits of youth work programmes exceed the costs by a factor of 2.22 over this period.

In terms of outcomes and impact, preliminary findings on thematic areas of youth work from the International Review of research evidence in youth work as mentioned above is worth highlighting. This work was commissioned by the Centre for Effective Services (CES) on behalf of the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA) and is being carried out by the Evidence for Policy and Practice Information and Co-ordinating Centre (EPPI-Centre) at the Institute of Education. Significantly, the ethos of youth work in Ireland, which emphasises collaboration, empowerment and personal and social development, is shared by much of the international research literature. In addition, the preliminary findings show that the aims of youth work are commonly categorised as personal and social development; social change; education and career; safety and well-being and contribution to society that is achieved by a broad range of activities – typically leisure and recreation; arts, drama, music; sports and physical activities; volunteer and service; social action; informal learning. Studies evaluating ‘impact’ also indicate that youth work is attempting to make an ambitious contribution to improving outcomes for young people, particularly in terms of their ‘sense of self’, ‘values and beliefs’, ‘relationships with others’ and engagement in society. The preliminary findings also show that the research highlights the commitment being made to generating evidence that is relevant to youth work policy and practitioners.

In terms of the key strengths of youth workers in supporting the lives of young people, in comparison to support provided by other professionals there is a widely held view that what distinguishes youth work from other professions and therefore the role of youth workers from other professionals is the values on which youth work is underpinned. Youth work is relationship-based - it is built around trust, respect and voluntary participation enhanced by a passionate and committed workforce that are concerned with supporting the lives of young people. As such there is a strong culture and positive approach towards supporting young people in Ireland centred on the need to design programmes with the young person to meet their needs by starting with where the young person is in order to build from there. There is also a view that youth workers and youth work in general is more flexible and more readily accessible to young people.
6.3 **SWOT**

Table 6.2  **Summary of key strengths and weaknesses of the youth work sector in Ireland**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STRENGTHS</th>
<th>OPPORTUNITIES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>■ Committed and passionate workforce</td>
<td>■ The Youth Policy Framework represents an opportunity to be strategic and plan for the development of youth work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>■ Commitment to evidence based and best practice with a growing body of evidence to demonstrate the value and impact of youth work in Ireland.</td>
<td>■ The Quality Standards framework presents an opportunity to affirm good work and to improve the quality of the offer.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>■ The diversity and quality of the youth service offer.</td>
<td>■ EU continued interest in youth work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>■ Contribution of youth work to social capital.</td>
<td>■ Economic downturn represents a good opportunity to reflect and re-orientate the work of the sector.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>■ Increased leadership role of Government.</td>
<td>■ Youth work sector needs to collectively showcase its work and impact.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WEAKNESSES</th>
<th>THREATS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>■ Dependence on state funding.</td>
<td>■ Too much focus on practice and not enough on evidence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>■ Lack of overarching strategic approach</td>
<td>■ Youth work considered not to be a political priority – desirable rather than essential.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>■ Unevenness of the offer in terms of the geographical spread and availability of youth work services.</td>
<td>■ Continued reduction in funding.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>■ Little or no resources for innovation at present due to budgetary constraints</td>
<td>■ Smaller, more specialised youth work organisations unable to compete against larger organisations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>■ Strong history of competition between organisations competing for limited and declining funds – curtails collaboration and limits sector unity.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>■ Certain target groups benefit more than others.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

7 **Conclusions and recommendations**

Overall, youth work has increased in importance in Ireland over the last 10 years. This has manifested itself through the introduction of a new government department, minister and assessor for youth work for the first time in Irish history. This represents a distinct move towards a more strategic and professional approach to youth work. This is evidenced by the implementation of the DCYA quality standards initiatives and support mechanisms, a political commitment to develop a new Youth Policy Framework and by the growing number of professionally endorsed qualifications now available in youth work in Ireland.
Despite considerable advances in youth work over the past 10 years, there are growing concerns about the sustainability of the sector due to cuts in government funding. Coupled with a view that more could be done to reach the most vulnerable young people in Irish society, there is a need for the sector to collaborate and be more united within the constraints of limited resources/capacity in order to be more inclusive, professional and evidenced based.

The increased focus on outcomes is such that outcomes should be measured and proportionate and commensurate with practice. Whilst the overall aim is to improve practice rather than prove practice, there is some concern that the value of youth work will become more output driven in terms of educational outcomes as is the case in Northern Ireland.

**Recommendations for national authorities**

- Align resources/budgets to the needs of young people based on a multi-annual framework that enables youth work organisations to plan strategically ahead.
- Ensure youth work provision is relevant and responsive to the current needs, themes and trends of all young people across Ireland.
- Grant greater recognition by government of the contribution and value of youth work.
- Develop an outcomes focus criteria for funding.
- Complete and implement the youth policy framework that is currently in development.
- Develop a coherent national framework for training of the youth work workforce with progression opportunities facilitated and supported by a programme of research and development.

**Recommendations for third sector organisations**

- Ensure an even spread of provision geographically and in terms of the groups of young people.
- Invest in research, development and evaluation.
- Put greater emphasis on inclusiveness.

**Recommendations for the EU**

- Continue providing funding opportunities.
- Continue providing leadership, evidence and guidelines for articulation of youth work.
- Continue providing a collective forum that Member States can learn from and share practice and evidence.
8 Sources

8.1 Interviewees

Department of Children and Youth Affairs. Date of interview: 25th of October 2012.
Foróige. Date of interview: 26th of October 2012.
BeLonG To. Date of interview: 1st of November 2012.

8.2 Bibliography


### 8.3 Website links to organisations cited in this report

BeLonG To - www.belongto.org

Dailnanog - www.dailnanog.ie

ECO-UNESCO - www.ecounesco.ie/

Exchange House - www.exchangehouse.ie

Feachtas - www.gaelteic.com/feachtas/
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Voices of Youth – www.voicesofyouth.wordpress.com
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Vote 16 - www.voteat16.ie
Youth Arts - www.youtharts.ie
Youth Council Northern Ireland - www.ycni.org
Youth Development - www.youthdeved.ie
Young Entrepreneur - www.youngentrepreneur.ie
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Youth Reach - www.youthreach.ie
Young Social Innovators - www.youngsocialinnovators.ie