

include YOUTH

Briefing Paper on Include Youth's response to the Department of Employment and Learning's Consultation on Pathways to Success

Strategic Focus and Steering and Implementation Mechanism

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INTRODUCTION

This paper is the first in a number of briefing papers being produced by Include Youth on its response to the Department for Employment and Learning's Pathways to Success consultation.

Include Youth's submission is grounded in the views of young people Include Youth works with, extensive practitioner based experience within and beyond Include Youth, research evidence, relevant international human rights standards and guidance and critical policy analysis. As such we have a significant amount of expertise and learning which we are keen to share.

The purpose of these briefing papers is to share that learning and those insights with members of the DEL Committee in a user friendly format.

This briefing paper focuses on Include Youth's key issues of concern in relation to the overall Strategic Focus of the Strategy as well as its proposed Steering and Implementation Mechanism. To access our full submission please click on the following link <http://includeyouth.org/policy/submissions>

STRATEGIC FOCUS

Need for greater alignment with other high level strategies

Disappointingly, despite being a cross-departmental Strategy, the consultation document does not convey a sense of inter-connectedness or alignment with other high level strategies. There is a need for much greater alignment of the Pathways to Success Strategy with other high level strategies which directly impact on young people at risk of becoming or already in the NEET category. These include the Children and Young People's Strategy, the Care Matters Strategy and the Northern Ireland Suicide Prevention Strategy and Action Plan.

The Strategy and related implementation plans also need to be explicitly referenced in the forthcoming Programme for Government and the associated Departmental Business plans.

Strategy needs to focus on 16-24 year olds as well as under 16s

While understanding the rationale given by DEL, Include Youth has concerns that the proposed prioritisation of work with 16-19 year olds will effectively mean that the Strategy's focus is limited to this age grouping.

Include Youth recommends that this proposal should be re-considered with a view to developing a seamless Strategy that effectively addresses the needs of all young people from 16-24 but also of under 16s.

Specific, high level engagement with employers needed

While the consultation document recognises that all sectors, including employers and businesses, have a role to play in tackling the issues affecting young people who are NEET, the document does not include plans for any high level engagement with employers. Include Youth strongly recommends that the Strategy includes a specific focus on employers. Specifically Include Youth recommends the formation of a regional Employers Forum or Task force made up of dedicated employers that have a regional presence and can help offer placements, training and jobs to young people not in education, training or employment. The potential merits of the model developed in Scotland should be explored.¹

Preventative work should be prioritised

Aside from a proposal to assess the overall impact of current interventions, including preventative early interventions, the consultation document does not reflect an adequate emphasis on early intervention and preventative work. Include Youth recommends the inclusion of a strategic objective specifically targeted at preventative work with under 16s.

The time frame for the Strategy needs to be extended

Include Youth believes that the projected time frame for the Strategy of three years is inadequate for a high level cross departmental Strategy designed to tackle an issue as complex and deep rooted as youth unemployment. The time frame for the Pathways to Success Strategy should be expanded from 3 to 10 years.

Clarification of statistical categories used is needed

The consultation document identifies young people as falling within three statistical subgroups, and suggests that the initial strategic direction should focus on those in group B

¹ The Scottish Strategy to address the issue of young people who are NEET 'More Choices, More Chances' (2006) has established a high level partnership of Scotland's most senior business people and respected educators, chaired by Sir Robert Smith, Chancellor of the University of the West of Scotland to tackle the issue of young people who are NEET.

i.e. those young people with an identifiable barrier (16% of the NEET population). However given that the vast majority (66%) of young people who are NEET are identified as falling within Group C, defined as those young people with no identifiable barrier, there is a need for much more information as to the reasons young people in this group end up being NEET.

STEERING AND IMPLEMENTATION MECHANISM

Role for the Ministerial Sub-Committee on Children and Young People

Key to the successful implementation of the Strategy will be the existence of a high level cross departmental group to co-ordinate delivery of its objectives and actions. The consultation document provides little detail as to how it is envisaged that this cross departmental collaboration and co-operation will happen but clearly it will need to be included on the agenda of the Ministerial Sub-Committee on Children and Young People.

Parity of representation from the community and voluntary sector

Include Youth has been actively involved in the NEETs Strategy Forum and is supportive of the proposed Forum Group for Stakeholders, with representation from this Forum onto the joint Steering and Implementation body and its constituent sub groups. Parity of representation from the community and voluntary sector with civil servants on the joint Steering and Implementation body must be ensured.

Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership as the vehicle for implementation

The new approach to children's services planning being led by the Health and Social Care Board at a regional level provides the optimal vehicle through which to take forward the implementation of the Pathways to Success Strategy. This regional approach to joint planning and commissioning of services for children and young people through the Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership should facilitate implementation of the Strategy from regional agency level down to local level. It should also ensure that the Strategy aligns to and supports delivery of the outcomes framework for the 10 year Strategy for Children and Young People.