

include YOUTH

Evidence for the Employment and Learning Committee's Inquiry into Careers Education, Information, Advice and Guidance (CEIAG) in Northern Ireland

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1.0 Who Include Youth is

1.1 Include Youth is an independent nongovernmental organisation that actively promotes the rights, best interests of and best practice with disadvantaged and vulnerable children and young people. The young people we work with and for include those from socially disadvantaged areas, those who have poor educational experiences, those from a care background, young people who have committed or are at risk of committing crime, misusing drugs or alcohol, engaging in unsafe sexual behaviour or other harmful activities or of being harmed themselves.

1.2 Include Youth's interface with the Careers Service is outside of the formal education system and is primarily within the context of its pre-vocational scheme, the Give & Take Scheme. The Give & Take scheme aims to improve the employability and increase the self esteem of young people in need or at risk from across Northern Ireland. It supports young people to overcome particular barriers that prevent them from moving into mainstream training or employment and towards independent living.

2.0 Introductory Comments

2.1 Include Youth recognises the shortcomings that have existed in relation to the Careers Service reaching and engaging with those young people who are outside of the formal education system, who tend to be among the most vulnerable and those furthest away from the labour market.

2.2 In its response to the Department of Employment and Learning's consultation on the Pathways to Success Strategy¹ Include Youth drew attention to the lack of consistency or adequacy of careers advice and guidance within schools, particularly for young people who are at risk of falling into the 'NEET' category. In addition we highlighted the fact that the Careers Service traditionally has not had a positive track record in engaging meaningfully or appropriately with young people who are classified as 'NEET'. Difficulties tend to include a 'one size fits all' approach, lack of flexibility, lack of understanding of barriers and needs and location of offices.

2.3 We therefore welcomed the proposals in the Pathways to Success Strategy for a strengthened role for the Careers Service in relation to young people who are at risk of becoming NEET or who already fall into that category, including proposals to case manage all 16-17 year olds who drop out of provision or do not have a positive destination when they leave school – for this to be successful the tracking system currently being developed will have to operate effectively as currently many of these young people simply disappear 'off the radar' as it were.

2.4 The Strategy also sets out plans to continue the development of partnership arrangements with relevant organisations. Include Youth has a positive experience of such a partnership agreement with the Careers Service in addressing the needs of young people who are classified as NEET.

This evidence focuses on that model of good practice and makes a number of recommendations as to how the elements of this model could be replicated more widely; as such it addresses Number 3 under the Committee's Terms of Reference for this Inquiry.

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3.0 Partnership Agreement between the Careers Service and Include Youth

3.1 Under the Big Lottery Fund, Include Youth, with support from the Careers Service, was successful in bidding for 5 year funding to deliver and enhance one to one mentoring services to disadvantaged young people to further improve education and careers outcomes. Securing that funding resulted in Include Youth and the Careers Service working collaboratively to identify best practice and to develop the range of services for young people on the Give & Take Scheme, while ensuring a consistent and coordinated approach to the delivery of those services.

3.2 In 2010 a regional Operational Partnership Agreement offering a menu of appropriate services was developed which ensures consistent delivery of services. Within this agreement review and evaluation are integral elements whereby individual participants and services delivered are reviewed and evaluated to inform strategy development at project management level.

3.3 A key factor in the successful development of this Partnership Agreement was the organisation of a joint regional workshop in March 2010 between Include Youth and the Careers Service, endorsed and attended by senior managers in both organisations. This event was instrumental in developing a better shared understanding of both the needs of this particular group of young people, the barriers they face and how the service could best be shaped and delivered to meet those needs and overcome the barriers. A strong working relationship was developed as a result which has been maintained and built upon in the intervening period.

3.4 The development of this Partnership Agreement has been a very positive development from the perspective of Include Youth staff and the young people they work with. Its benefits were also recognised more widely: in 2010 the Partnership Agreement received an award at the ICG Careers Conference.

3.5 A key element of its success to date has been the flexibility in approach and delivery:

“the way the Careers Service is organised is different in Give & Take as the Careers Adviser comes round to you, in your environment. As we have the same Careers Adviser every time it’s easier to get to build up a relationship with the Adviser” (young person on the Give & Take scheme)

“I find Sorcha easy to talk to and the fact that she comes to the Give & Take office is far better for me because I feel more comfortable there than in the Careers office” (young person on the Give & Take scheme)

“Ronan my Careers Adviser was really interested in me and my chances of getting into the tech to do a tiling course. He gave me advice and told me he will check to see what he could do to help me get a place. He seemed really genuine and interested in my future” (young person on the Give & Take scheme)

3.6 The expertise and commitment of the individual Careers Advisers has also been an important factor in the success of the partnership:

“We have a really good relationship with Helena, and over the past number of months we have worked at linking up more often in order to ensure this continues. Helena has been a great help in finding potential work placements for young people, as well as appropriate move on options. We regularly organise career drop ins, when Helena will come to our Give & Take office and check in with the young people on the scheme. She also meets young people when they start on the scheme, to explain her role and how it ties in with their time on the scheme” (Give & Take staff member)

“Since starting my post as Project Worker for Include Youth on the Give & Take scheme in January 2010 I have seen the relationship between ourselves and the Careers Service to be very important. I have to give particular praise to Ronan McAteer for his commitment to our young people. He has shown great interest in the progression of our youth. Ronan works individually with our young people sharing advice, support and guidance regarding employment, education and training opportunities” (Give & Take staff member)

3.7 Reflecting on the critical elements that have led to the development and success of the Operational Partnership Agreement between Include Youth and the Careers Service a number of factors can be identified, which are shared below. We hope they will be helpful to the Employment and Learning Committee in making recommendations for improvements in policy, procedures and practices in order to maximise the delivery of the Careers Service to young people who are classified as ‘NEET’.

- 3.7.1 The Careers Service should continue to develop partnership agreements with organisations working with young people vulnerable to social exclusion in line with the initial target it set in the Preparing for Success Strategy and Implementation Plan (Action 13) and the commitment to the same included in the Pathways to Success Strategy (3.40).
- 3.7.2 Support for and endorsement of the Partnership Agreement from the highest level in both parties to the Agreement is critical to its success.
- 3.7.3 Time and effort must be invested by both parties to the Agreement in developing a shared understanding of the needs of the particular client group and how best to meet these needs.
- 3.7.4 Regular reviews and evaluations need to be built into the operation of the Partnership Agreement, with these reviews/evaluations informing strategy development at project management level.
- 3.7.5 The interest and aptitude of the individual Careers Advisers in working with young people who are vulnerable and disadvantaged is hugely important in their ability to work successfully with these young people; if is preferable if the particular Careers Advisers can

'volunteer' themselves to work with this client group as they are then more likely to have the necessary interest and empathy.

- 3.7.6 Young people's participation in monitoring and evaluation of the service is crucial and should be explicitly included in the Partnership Agreement.
- 3.7.7 The importance of outreach work by the Careers Service must be fully recognised and prioritised. As the quotes from young people on our Give and Take Scheme earlier in this submission have shown, there are significant benefits to be gained from Careers Service proactively going out to meet organisations and the clients they support at those organisations premises, rather than placing the expectation on hard to reach young people classified as NEET making their way to Careers Service offices.
- 3.7.8 Careers Service should be open to Careers Advisers participating in relevant career focussed group work activities that may take place within external organisations. Their expert and professional input to group sessions on different career/ETE themes add value to the more traditional/structured service of on one-to-one 'CGI' (careers guidance interviews).
- 3.7.9 DEL should consider organising a conference on the theme of tackling youth unemployment. This could see a comprehensive gathering of government departments, statutory agencies, schools, colleges, academics, training organisations and prevocational schemes like the Give and Take Scheme coming together to promote best practice, share ideas, reflect, inform and influence current and emerging public policy development and implementation.