

# include YOUTH

## **Response to Department for Employment and Learning's consultation on Steps2Success (NI)**

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## **Include Youth**

Include Youth is an independent non-governmental 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 had poor educational experiences, those from a care background, young people who have committed or are at risk of committing crime, misusing drugs or alcohol, undertaking unsafe sexual behaviour or other harmful activities, or of being harmed themselves.

The Give and Take Scheme aims to improve the employability and increase the self-esteem of young people in need or at risk from across Northern Ireland. The Scheme works with approximately 135 young people aged 16-21 years old from a care or criminal justice background. The Scheme aims to support young people to overcome particular barriers that prevent them from moving into mainstream training or employment and towards independent living. 75% of young people on the Scheme are care experienced while over a third has a background in offending.

Include Youth also delivers an Employability Service on behalf of two of the Health Trusts for young people aged 16 + who have had experience of the care system. This service is designed to offer tangible and concrete opportunities to assist young people leaving care to prepare for, and engage in work.

Include Youth has also been a Specialist Support Provider to DEL's Training for Success Programme since 2007. This service helps improve retention and encourage progression for young people who present with multiple barriers to their learning.

Reflecting the profile of the young people we work with, Include Youth's two main policy priority areas are employability and youth justice. We have engaged closely with the development by the Department for Employment and Learning of the recently published Pathways to Success Strategy as well as with the Department of Justice's reviews of youth justice and prisons. We are currently engaged in follow up work arising from all of these reviews.

## **Approach to this response**

Include Youth has been a member of NICVA's Working Group on the new employment programme and has endorsed its position paper 'Shaping an Employment Programme what Works'. **In particular we endorse the following overarching principles developed by NICVA's working group:**

**Local works best** - the programme needs to reflect the realities of the problem in Northern Ireland and be delivered by organisations with local expertise, thus delivering the best possible outcomes for people seeking work.

**Those who need the programme most should have easiest access to it** – any new programme must be structured in such a way that gives priority to 'hard to reach' groups and does not allow delivery organisations to 'cherry pick' clients that are easiest to work with or who are likely to help them reach their targets by finding employment quickly (see reference to IPPR/Private Equity Foundation research below).

Include Youth attended a round table discussion event on this consultation organised by NICVA on 20 September and discussions and concerns raised at that event have helped to inform our response.

**Include Youth also works closely with colleagues in Save the Children and we endorse in full their response to this consultation**, which raised a number of concerns regarding how the proposed employment programme is likely to impact on child poverty levels in Northern Ireland and on government's statutory obligations to meet the targets set in the Child Poverty Act 2010.

## **Comments**

**We welcome the opportunity to respond to this consultation and are supportive of the underlying policy intent of assisting people who are unemployed to find and sustain employment.** We recognise the importance of decently paid, sustainable work as a route out of poverty – given the latest unemployment figures which indicated that 8.2% of the overall working age population and 23.5% of all 18-24 year olds were unemployed, the need for such a programme does not need to be underlined. While the publication of the Northern Ireland Executive's Pathways to Success Strategy, and the announcement of funding to implement this Strategy are both very much to be welcomed, with the 'NEET'



population of 16-24 year olds in Northern Ireland at 46,000 the scale of the challenge cannot be underestimated.

With the seriously high child poverty levels in Northern Ireland, with more than one in five children living in poverty in 2010/11 and 21% living in persistent poverty, unless radical action is taken to address rising unemployment it is predicted that these figures could rise to as high as 34% by 2020, an appalling vista in any developed society.

**There is clearly a need for explicit links to be made between the proposed new Employment Programme and other strategies and policies** such as the Pathways to Success Strategy including the Youth Employment Scheme flowing from it and a long awaited childcare strategy. **In this context we would ask how the Youth Employment Scheme and the Steps2Success will interact – how will decisions be made as to which programme a young person from the 18-24 year old age group will be placed on? Will it be related to the length of time which they have been claiming unemployment benefit? It would be helpful to have more information on this.**

**The difficult economic climate also has a bearing on the proposed employment programme.** The economic recession has greatly reduced the availability of work, an essential element in the success of any employment programme. The lack of jobs is having a particularly negative, downwards squeeze on young people with limited or no qualifications, those in the core 'NEET' population. Research by the Institute of Public Policy Research (IPPR) and the Private Equity Foundation in 2010 found that 11.4% of young adults with degrees and 9.1% with A levels were unemployed in the first quarter of 2010.

### **One size does not fit all – individually tailored approaches work best in achieving outcomes**

Based on our lengthy experience of working intensively and successfully with individuals to help them move into education, training or employment<sup>1</sup> Include Youth strongly advocates that the new Employment Programme must have at its core a genuinely client centred approach. We endorse the following recommendations made in this regard by NICVA:

- Develop a first point of contact service which operates independently from service providers. It should offer a comprehensive needs assessment and impartial guidance to people on the range of options open to them from private, statutory and voluntary and community providers.

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<sup>1</sup> Include Youth (2010) Give and Take Scheme Evaluation Report 2008-2010

- Ensure each person beginning the programme has their employment and development needs assessed by a highly skilled and empathic assessor who is fully aware of all the options open to them and values each intervention equally.
- Bring together a comprehensive menu which is flexible enough to ensure that everyone seeking employment has access to the entire range of training and employment opportunities available.
- Remove any existing bureaucratic barriers, especially those relating to funding sources, which prevent people from accessing the programme of interventions that work best for them.
- Recognise the value of employment of people for under 16 hours.

## **More than a Job – supporting people who need education, training and employment**

While finding a job is the ultimate goal it cannot be the only measure of success when it comes to the difficult journey to employment that many people who are unemployed, including vulnerable young people, people with disabilities or people who are long term unemployed have to travel.

Again, Include Youth's experience in delivering employability programmes has demonstrated that young people's need for support and development does not abruptly tail off once they take up a training or work placement. Vulnerable young people who have faced a whole host of barriers to accessing and engaging in education, training and employment will need ongoing support and development, including mentoring support<sup>2</sup> to sustain that placement.

### **Duration**

We agree with the concerns raised by colleagues in the voluntary and community sector around the duration proposed in the programme, specifically that 52 weeks is not long enough to get somebody into work. In 52 weeks you can show a lot of progress, however, for clients with complex needs, mental health issues for example, the focus ought to be on employability not solely on jobs. Subsequently, the sector proposes that some flexibility should be built into the programme, such as an option to review at the end of the first year.

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<sup>2</sup> Include Youth (2011) Evaluation Report: Give and Take Scheme's Personal Development/ Mentoring Components