



Review of Community Relations

Response by the JEDI Steering Group Based on questions outlined within the Questionnaire for People in Leadership Roles

Section 1 – Current Policy

1. Is the concept of community relations still relevant in 2008?

Yes

Society in Northern Ireland is trying to emerge from 30 years of violent conflict. Over the past 10 years perceptible changes have occurred and the foundations of a new society can be discerned, but it is a journey for the long haul. The new institutions remain fragile. Deep divisions based on differing identities and allegiances and on differing perceptions of the nature of equity, justice and democracy continue to plague our society. Now more than ever work aimed specifically at reducing social division and sectarian conflict remains a priority for those committed to the creation of a peaceful society.

As the Children and Young Person's Action Plan for 2007-2008 has stated, 'Children and Young People have so much to offer communities in which they live and Northern Ireland society as a whole. Their contributions will be particularly relevant and of significant value as we move away from conflict towards a shared future' (OFMDFM, March 2007).

Ensuring our young people can thrive and are enabled to reach their full potential within what is an increasingly fast changing, pluralist and global society is an important goal of our education system. Work aimed at supporting young people to understand and accept difference is core to this goal. Additionally, the Racial Equality Strategy set out a framework for the creation of a community where racism, in any form, is not tolerated. A new Department of Education policy for Community Relations must seek to facilitate the creation of opportunities for Children and Young People to play their part in the achievement of this important framework.

2. Are you aware of the Department of Education Community Relations Policy and related schemes?

Department of Education Community Relations Policy

Strengths

Provision of a specific policy in this area provides strategic direction and facilitates the promotion of the Community Relations agenda across formal and non-formal education provision in Northern Ireland.

Weaknesses

Communication of the Policy across all stakeholders is limited, with the result that there can be a lack of awareness of its purpose and/or limited buy-in. The current Policy promotes one off activities with young people but is much less successful at promoting whole organisational approaches.

Funding Schemes

Although aware of the Community Relations Core Funding Scheme, Schools Community Relations Programme and Cultural Traditions, the JEDI members are not sufficiently familiar with the operational impact of these schemes to comment on their strengths and weaknesses.

Youth Service Community Relations Support Scheme (YSCRSS) and the ***Community Relations Youth Service Support Scheme*** (CRYSS) are important drivers in Youth Service delivery.

Strengths

Context - Youth work happens not only in local communities, but is often led by the local community, sometimes through local volunteers, often through local people working in a part-time capacity. It is also underpinned by an ethos of voluntary engagement; in other words young people voluntarily choose to participate. This creates a very different context than that experienced in formal education. Each of the youth service schemes aim to support activists within the local community to take the lead on this agenda, with the result that since their inception each scheme has aspired to provide guidance and related training and capacity building opportunities. These opportunities have contributed much to the building of confidence and the development of the skills necessary to engage local communities in community relations work. As Alan Smith recently noted in his opening remarks of the UNESCO conference (September 2008) the most effective work in the area of community relations is led at local community level by the local community.

Expertise - Collectively the youth service schemes have supported a wealth of work with young people and resulted in the development of a body of expertise which is drawn upon across formal education and community sectors.

JEDI - The work of the JEDI initiative has informed developments across these schemes. The EDI training suite developed by the initiative underpins each of the schemes, with accredited programmes available for young people, voluntary and part-time youth workers, experienced full-time youth workers as well as a programme for managers and policy makers. In terms of supporting organisational change, the CRYSS Scheme provides grant aid to assist youth organisations to deliver policies, strategies, training and/or practice in support of the work to embed the principles of Equity, Diversity and Interdependence (EDI) into the ethos, policies and practices of their organisations.

Impacts and Successes as identified by External Evaluations – Each scheme has been externally evaluated; YSCRSS by CAPITA in 2001 and CRYSS by

Feedback opposite also relevant to Qs 5, 6a & 6b of official questionnaire.

Mattessich in 2002. Although some of the findings are specific to each scheme, the following overarching impacts and successes were noted across both:

- Significant numbers of young people provided with the opportunity to gain a practical understanding of different cultural traditions.
- Young people equipped to contribute positively to the building of community relations.
- Changes to policies, activities and (in the case of CRYSSS) organisational transformation noted.
- Commitment and support of Youth Officers a key strength in the development of good practice.
- Availability of appropriate guidance to support development.
- Development of innovative practices with potential to offer learning for other countries in conflict.

Feedback opposite also relevant to Q 6b of official questionnaire.

Weaknesses

Focus on short term initiatives - Limited resources and (linked to this) limited capacity to support long term community relations initiatives.

Focus on traditional community relations work - Limited capacity of each scheme to address racism and/or wider issues of discrimination and (related to this) no clear guidance on the balance of what may be termed traditional community relations work (i.e. that which is concerned solely with the Catholic and Protestant community) to be supported vis-à-vis that which promotes relations with and between ethnic minority groups.

Limited capacity to support whole organisational change measures – As previously mentioned CRYSSS does provide grant aid to assist youth organisations to deliver policies, strategies, training and/or practice in support of the work to embed the principles of Equity, Diversity and Interdependence (EDI) into the ethos, policies and practices of their organisations. However, this funding is limited and not linked to a service wide strategy for management training limiting its effectiveness.

3. How would you rate the impact of the Department of Education's Community Relations Policy on your work?

High Impact – as previously noted this policy provides the strategic direction for all related work across the statutory and voluntary youth work sector.

4. Please indicate which of the following Community Relations schemes your organisation has accessed?

It is not appropriate for the JEDI Steering Group to respond to this question.

5. In your experience, have the schemes delivered opportunities for children and young people to meet so they can learn about each other, respect each others beliefs and backgrounds, recognise and learn to appreciate the common ground they share, increase their capacity to deal with difference?

The evaluations of projects funded under each scheme strongly support the view that the **Youth Service Community Relations Support Scheme** (YSCRSS) and the **Community Relations Youth Service Support Scheme** (CRYSSS) have provided opportunities for children and young people to achieve all of the above. Additionally, this research is supported by the CAPITA (2001) and Mattessich (2002) external evaluations for each scheme (see response to Q2 for details).

6. (a) What are the main challenges in delivering/addressing the activities within the schemes and have these been overcome?

As noted at the outset of this response, although society has moved to a more peaceful situation, as research shows, it remains deeply divided. Thus, engaging local activists to lead on activities aimed at building relations across these divisions is an ongoing challenge.

The delegation of the **Youth Service Community Relations Support Scheme** (YSCRSS) and the **Community Relations Youth Service Support Scheme** (CRYSSS) to the ELB Youth Service and YCNI respectively marked the beginning of a process of development to facilitate local community engagement that has continued to this day and includes good practice guidance, training, opportunities for shared practice and the show casing of best practice.

The RDP research launched in 2001 highlighted the need for more coherence across the various youth work bodies involved in the delivery of this work. The recommendations from this comprehensive research have been taken forward by the JEDI Initiative. Details of these recommendations and the work undertaken to meet these challenges are available in the attached JEDI 10 year review paper.

Additionally this research (a full copy of which can be downloaded from the JEDI website www.jedini.com) provided baseline data for the youth service on issues such as: % of respondents who had received community relations/citizenship training; % of youth organisations with a community relations policy in place; and % of respondents requesting help to develop community relations or citizenship work, with the following resource requirements identified by respondents as key to developing this work area:

- Effective Policies
- Training
- Support Materials
- Funding

As a result of the work of JEDI the following developments have informed work funded under the **Youth Service Community Relations Support Scheme**

(YSCRSS) and the **Community Relations Youth Service Support Scheme** (CRYSSS) to meet some of challenges highlighted by the RDP research:

- Introduction of the EDI principles highlighting the need to widen the aims of this work to fulfil the Good Relations agenda and the implications of S75 generally
- Joint voluntary and statutory youth service initiatives in policy development, provide management training, shared practice and best practice showcasing
- Efforts (in line with developments in Citizenship education) to broaden practice beyond the promotion of cultural understanding to address themes of inequality and social justice
- Raft of new accredited training programmes for young people, volunteers/part-time youth workers, full-time experienced youth workers and managers
- Whole organisational responses to community relations/EDI themes developed
- Critical reflective practice models developed to support improved self evaluation

For the JEDI Steering Group's response to Q6 (b) and Q6 (c) please see feedback referenced within Q2.

7. What priority does your organisation place on educating children and young people about community relations and diversity more widely?

High

Peace building was one of the values to underpin the 2005-2008 Youth Work Strategy which stated that 'Youth Work should actively promote a peaceful and inclusive society based on equity, diversity and interdependence' (DE, 2005, p.5). Within this strategy 'delivering effective inclusive youth work' was a priority, with the following objective:

'Review and amend the Department of Education's Community Relations Strategy for the youth service in light of developments in Equity, Diversity and Interdependence.'

As the document noted, 2008 was not envisaged as an end date for its underpinning priorities, but that work would be carried forward into the next strategic period.

During the 2007/08 financial year JEDI conducted comprehensive research into quality assuring this field of work across the statutory and voluntary youth service. The recommendations made by this research have been referenced within Q14.

Section 2 – Training, Support and Delivery

8. Have staff received the appropriate training and support to undertake community relations and diversity work?

9. Have you received training and support to deal with the issues of community relations and diversity?

10. Is there any training and support that would be beneficial but is not currently available?

It is not appropriate for the JEDI Steering Group to respond to the above questions, however at this point it is important restate the raft of training programmes that have been developed by the JEDI Initiative and are available to young people, volunteers/part-time workers, experienced full-time workers and managers.

These programmes were developed in response to comprehensive research into the needs of the youth service (RDP, 2001) and have been specifically developed to provide for the needs of practitioners working with young people, rather than being specifically for Youth Workers.

Please see attached paper – EDI Training Suite Outline. The JEDI Steering Group is willing to offer up any of the above programmes for development in light of further needs identified as part of this current review.

11. For the areas listed below, what opportunities do children and young people have within your organisation to learn about community relations and diversity?

It is not appropriate for the JEDI Steering Group to respond to the above questions; however at this point it is important to restate the areas supported under the CRYSSS and YSCRSS.

CRYSSS

The purpose of CRYSSS is to enhance the capacity of youth-based organisations to make an effective contribution to improving relations in Northern Ireland. This contribution may be through work with young people or through a process of institutional change and development. A concern to address one or more of the following issues must be fundamental to projects seeking CRYSSS funding:

- Sectarian and prejudice-based issues
- Tension and conflict (particularly at interface areas)
- The development of integrated/inclusive youth work
- Communication, trust, tolerance and respect for different cultures, faiths and traditions

Embedding the principles of Equity, Diversity and Interdependence (EDI) into the ethos, policies and practices of youth work organisations underpins this purpose.

Grant aid is available to assist youth organisations to deliver policies, strategies, training and/or practice in support of the above purpose.

Priority will be given to applications that meet one or more of the following objectives:

- Develop innovative community relations/EDI projects and programmes which are capable of replication elsewhere
- Improve the effectiveness of community relations/EDI work within the voluntary youth sector
- Provide opportunities for greater interaction and sharing of experience between Youth Service organisations around the issues of community relations, mutual understanding, prejudice reduction and conflict transformation
- Promote the Youth Service curriculum
- Embed the principles of EDI

Bids which are developmental in nature, and which are related to a clear community relations/EDI policy and strategy are also prioritised.

YSCRSS

The revised YSCRSS guidelines offer participating groups and individuals an incremental approach to the development of community relations work.

- Preparatory Work: Aim – to introduce young people to the concept of community relations and prepare them for interaction with other groups.
- Community Relations Development Programme: It is recognised that individuals and groups engage in community relations work at varying levels and outcomes will differ according to the nature of the programme and the starting point of participants. Therefore, programmes of interaction operate within three levels – *Foundation Work*, *Issue Work* and *Conflict Resolution*.
- Enhanced Programme: This may be approved where applicants can cite exceptional difficulties about economic deprivation, sectarian tension or other particular circumstances.

Each application is considered on its merits and on the availability of funds. Applicants must meet the criteria for funding as outlined in the YSCRSS guidelines. In applying for financial assistance, applicants are asked to provide a programme plan including objectives and related success criteria. Subject to approval, funding is normally available in the following areas: Transport, entrance charges, hire of premises materials and residentials. Funding is capped according to the type and level of programme.

Section 3 – Future Policy

12. Which are the main areas which children and young people need to learn about to enable them to respect and value difference?

Section 75.2 prioritises Political Opinion, Racial Group and Religious Group as central to the building of Good Relations within Northern Ireland. The JEDI model highlights the importance of paying attention to the principles of Equity, Diversity and Interdependence to facilitate the development of a more peaceful and inclusive society where difference is accepted and the interconnectedness of all social groups is valued.

Harnessing the developments outlined under Q2.

More recently concern that the current political dispensation may fail to acknowledge the important role played by work funded under the community relations banner has presented a major challenge to this work.

13. What improvements could be made to how we currently address the above?

A wider policy agenda to embrace Good Relations and a strategy to embrace EDI developments within the youth service.

A Policy which actively promotes organisational change processes and a training strategy with opportunities for all stakeholders from young people to managers.

14. Other comments.

During the 2007/08 financial year JEDI conducted comprehensive research into quality assuring EDI within the youth sector in Northern Ireland. This research made the following recommendations:

I. The lead statutory body for youth should continue to co-ordinate and drive an EDI strategy within the Youth Sector.

II. The principles of EDI should be included in the ETI's new Quality Indicators for Youth Work, with an emphasis on self evaluation and reflective practice.

III. The Department of Education Review of Community Relations should address the need to embed EDI into policy and practice at very level within the Youth Sector.

IV. A cross-sectoral group should be convened to explore the idea of developing bespoke quality assurance/continuous improvement systems, at either local, organisational or regional level, for improving quality in all key areas of youth work, including EDI, with a strong emphasis on self evaluation and reflective practice.

V. There should be continued training and support for implementing principles of EDI in the Youth Sector, and this should be particularly targeted at both managers and local units.

VI. The Curriculum Development Unit should ensure that the EDI principles within the Model for Effective Practice curriculum become central to youth work practice.

The above recommendations should inform a new Policy.