



# Research Report

Quality Assuring the Equity, Diversity and  
Interdependence Model within the Youth Sector  
in Northern Ireland

March 2008

# Quality Assuring the Equity, Diversity and Interdependence Model within the Youth Sector in Northern Ireland

## Introduction

This is a report on research to assess the feasibility of developing an Equity, Diversity and Interdependence (EDI) Quality Assurance Model for the Youth Sector in Northern Ireland.

The research was carried out by independent consultants, Macaulay Associates, during 2007/2008. The purpose of the research was ‘to study and make recommendations on the operationalising of the EDI model for Quality Assurance within the Youth Service in Northern Ireland.’ The research objectives were:

- 1) To identify and provide a brief outline of management and quality assurance models commonly in use and the diversity excellence models available and how these compare to the EDI model
- 2) To assess the application and knowledge of quality assurance and diversity excellence models within youth services, and support for the EDI quality assurance model
- 3) To explore the feasibility and implication of operationalising the EDI model with relevant parties.
- 4) To report on the findings and make recommendations on the operationalising of the EDI model for Quality Assurance.

The research was commissioned by the JEDI<sup>1</sup> Initiative to inform its future strategy and development. JEDI is an initiative, which brings together the various parts of the Northern Ireland Youth Sector, in a creative partnership to promote change and development.

---

<sup>1</sup>JEDI stands for 'Joined in Equity, Diversity and Interdependence'



The joint aims of JEDI are:

- To develop a coherent strategy for community relations youth work and education for citizenship within the Northern Ireland youth sector.
- To embed the interrelated principles of equity, diversity and interdependence into the ethos policies and programmes of the organisations which make up the youth sector.

### **Methodology**

The methodology employed to achieve these objectives was as follows:

- Desk Research: The researcher analysed primary and secondary sources, various quality assurance models and web-based information. (See Appendix III for separate report)
- Survey. A questionnaire was designed and circulated to all statutory and voluntary youth work agencies in Northern Ireland. 24 youth work managers (See Appendix IV for separate report) and 8 youth workers returned surveys.
- Interviews: A series of semi-structured interviews were carried out with a sample of eight key stakeholders across the Youth Sector in Northern Ireland. (See Appendix I for a list of questions and interviewees)
- Focus Groups: Three focus groups were facilitated with 21 youth work practitioners, one with youth workers from the statutory sector and two with youth workers from the voluntary sector. (See Appendix II for a list of questions and participants)



### **Application and Knowledge of Quality Assurance Models**

The quality assurance models most commonly used by the 24 respondents to the Youth Work Managers Survey were Investors in People (44%), Quality Assurance Framework for Youth (44%) and Charter Mark (26%). The only two models that all respondents were aware of were Investors in People and Charter Mark.

There were low levels of awareness and use of diversity excellence models. 52% of respondents had never heard of the Diversity Excellence Model and none were using it. 2 respondents were using Diversity Matters/Diversity Works.

However, 75% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that quality assurance models are an effective way of creating organisational change.

The models which some respondents identified as having been effective in supporting their group/organisation to address issues of equity, diversity and interdependence in Northern Ireland were Investors in People (9 respondents), Quality Assurance Framework for Youth (9 respondents) and Charter Mark (6 respondents).

Most focus group participants were aware of Investors in People and the Quality Assurance Framework for Youth.

Youth workers in smaller voluntary sector organisations tended not to use quality assurance frameworks due to limited resources. These systems were perceived as resource hungry and bureaucratic. Several larger voluntary organisations had developed their own approach to quality standards and measures<sup>2</sup> and these had a focus on processes such as reflective practice and continuous improvement.

---

<sup>2</sup> YMCA Standards and YouthAction NI Descriptor Scales



Most youth workers whose organisations used quality assurance systems indicated that although they did address issues of equality and diversity, they did not explicitly address interdependence. The implementation of these systems was generally regarded by youth workers who had experience of them, mainly within the statutory sector, as an occasional and valuable support to EDI, rather than an ongoing driver of EDI organisational change.

A considerable number of consultees expressed concerns that quality assurance schemes can be reduced to a 'tick box' exercise that meet minimum requirements.

### **Support/Feasibility for an EDI Quality Assurance Model**

The research found limited support for a new separate EDI Quality Assurance Model for the Youth Sector in Northern Ireland.

50% of respondents to the Youth Work Managers survey agreed or strongly agreed that an EDI quality assurance model would be an effective way of embedding EDI principles within the Northern Ireland Youth Sector. 33% neither agreed nor disagreed and 17% disagreed or strongly disagreed, questioning whether it needed to be a separate model.

38% of respondents neither agreed nor disagreed that their agency/organisation would benefit from achieving a recognised EDI quality kite mark. 33% disagreed or strongly disagreed and 29% agreed.

46% of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed that they would like to see funding and resources being linked to the achievement of a recognised EDI quality kite mark. 21% neither agreed nor disagreed and only 8% agreed or strongly agreed.

In the focus groups with youth work practitioners there was very little support for a separate EDI quality assurance system. Those who did support the idea believed that it would be an effective way to drive mainstreaming of EDI across the sector, as they believed it was premature to accept that the principles and practices of EDI had been substantially embedded. They believed that EDI would inevitably become lost within broader quality assurance systems.

None of the interviewees supported the idea of a new separate EDI Quality Assurance Model for the Youth Sector in Northern Ireland. All the key stakeholders interviewed placed a strong emphasis on quality assuring EDI through mainstream quality assurance and/or continuous improvement systems and processes. This approach was regarded as a potentially effective way of mainstreaming EDI across the sector.

However, a number of different approaches to incorporating EDI into existing quality assurance systems were suggested.

The main suggestions were:

- *Quality assure EDI through existing generic quality assurance models*

58% of respondents to the Youth Work managers Survey agreed or strongly agreed that EDI can be effectively addressed through existing quality assurance models. 33% neither agreed nor disagreed and 9% disagreed or strongly disagreed.

79% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that EDI should be mainstreamed into existing quality assurance models.

However the practitioners and stakeholders consulted through the interviews and focus groups highlighted the limitations in taking this approach.



The main difficulties identified were limited current use of these frameworks across the sector, particularly in the voluntary sector, the absence of the interdependence principle from existing models and the limited impact of such systems on the work of practitioners.

There was some consensus that EDI had been embedded to a significant extent in the Youth Service, particularly in the Model of Effective Practice, in part time training and in the professional development of professional youth workers. The use of EDI to highlight broader inclusion issues beyond a traditional community relations agenda was highlighted.

92% of respondents to the Youth Work Managers Survey had a good working knowledge of the principles of Equity, Diversity and Interdependence and 92% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that EDI are important principles within Youth Work: A Model for Effective Practice. 83% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that EDI is relevant in the day-to-day work of a manager in the Youth Sector.

79% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that there is a good level of awareness of the JEDI initiative in their organisation/agency and 75% of respondents' agency/organisations had participated in the JEDI initiative very often or regularly.

63% of respondents' agency/organisations had participated in training provided by the JEDI initiative very often or regularly and 67% of respondents' agency/organisations had engaged youth workers in critical reflective practice on the EDI principles very often or regularly.



75% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that their agency/organisation had successfully implemented an EDI organisational change initiative and 92% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they are comfortable addressing the issues raised by EDI within their organisation.

However, there was also consensus among the stakeholders consulted that EDI principles had not yet been fully embedded at local unit level (where the language and jargon of EDI had been a barrier) and among managers (where competing priorities such as resources, had been a major barrier).

46% of respondents to the Youth Work Managers Survey agreed or strongly agreed that EDI is now embedded within the Northern Ireland Youth Sector. 33% neither agreed nor disagreed and 21% disagreed or strongly disagreed.

While there is strong support for mainstreaming the quality assuring of EDI, there is a sense that leaving this to the work of mainstream generic quality assurance systems is likely to have a limited impact in further embedding EDI across the sector. One comment in a focus group was that *'it is not yet at the heart of the curriculum even though it is there in writing'*.

- *Quality assure EDI through the new Quality Indicators for Youth Work being developed by the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI)*

Interviewees identified ETI as having responsibility for quality assurance within the Youth Service, and as a result, believed that EDI should be included in the new Quality Indicators for Youth Work. They believed that this would be the most effective way of quality assuring EDI across the sector.



Some practitioners were wary of associating EDI with inspection which they regarded as closer to the formal education sector rather than the developmental processes of the informal sector. However, they indicated that they would be less concerned if the ETI approach had a greater emphasis on self evaluation and reflective practice. ETI is currently developing a stronger emphasis on self evaluation.

- *Quality assure EDI through bespoke continuous improvement systems with an emphasis on self evaluation and reflective practice*

Several interviewees and practitioners expressed an interest in developing bespoke quality development systems, at either local, organisational or regional level, for improving quality with a strong emphasis on self evaluation and reflective practice.

Consultees who suggested this approach tended to see it as a holistic approach which would incorporate all key areas of youth work practice including EDI, but not exclusively focussed on EDI. Youth workers would be involved in creating and therefore have ownership of the system and it could include elements such as peer assessment and partnership.

- *Quality assure EDI through providing effective training*

There was some consensus among the stakeholders consulted that EDI training had been an effective way of driving EDI organisational change processes.



71% of respondents to the Youth Work Managers Survey agreed or strongly agreed that the Northern Ireland Youth Sector needs training and support to implement principles of EDI. 50% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that central co-ordination is needed to promote/embed EDI and 71% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the lead statutory body for youth should continue to co-ordinate an EDI strategy within the youth sector.

As a result of this positive assessment of EDI training to date, there was a sense that effective training in itself could assure quality. There was some consensus that this training should be targeted at parts of the sector where EDI was less well embedded; in local part time units and among managers (both local and regional).



## Main Conclusions

The main conclusions of the research are as follows:

- I. There was a high level of awareness, knowledge, participation, practice and support of EDI among the stakeholders consulted during the research.
- II. There were contrasting views over whether EDI is now embedded within the Northern Ireland Youth Sector. While EDI has been significantly embedded, it is less well embedded at local unit level and among managers.
- III. Investors in People and the Quality Assurance Framework for Youth are the most widely recognised and used quality assurance systems. However, youth workers in smaller voluntary sector organisations tended not to use quality assurance frameworks due to limited resources.
- IV. There is limited support for a new separate EDI Quality Assurance Model for the Youth Sector in Northern Ireland.
- V. There is support for quality assuring EDI through mainstream quality assurance and/or continuous improvement systems and processes. However there are limitations in using existing generic quality assurance systems including limited current use of these frameworks across the sector, particularly in the voluntary sector, the absence of the interdependence principle from existing models and the limited impact of such systems on the work of practitioners.
- VI. The development of the new Quality Indicators for Youth Work by the ETI is an opportunity to ensure ongoing quality assurance of EDI across the sector, particularly with a greater emphasis on self evaluation and reflective practice.



- VII. There is some interest in developing bespoke quality assurance systems, at either local, organisational or regional level, for improving quality with a strong emphasis on self evaluation and reflective practice. This would be a holistic approach incorporating all key areas of youth work practice including EDI.
- VIII. There was a need identified for ongoing targeted training and support to implement principles of EDI. There were contrasting views over whether central co-ordination is needed to promote/embed EDI but generally agreement that the lead statutory body for youth should continue to co-ordinate an EDI strategy within the Youth Sector.



## Recommendations

As a result of these conclusions it is suggested that the JEDI Steering Group bring the following recommendations to the Youth Service Liaison Forum:

- 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.



## Appendix I: Interviews

### JEDI Semi Structured Interview Questions

1. To what extent have the principles of EDI been embedded in the Youth Sector?
2. What have been the successes and benefits of the JEDI Initiative?
3. What have been the limitations and barriers to the JEDI Initiative?
4. How do you think the JEDI Initiative could most effectively quality assure EDI in the youth sector?
5. To what extent have quality assurance models been effective in supporting youth organisations to address issues of equity, diversity and interdependence in Northern Ireland?
6. To what extent do you think EDI could and should be mainstreamed into existing quality assurance models?
7. What do you think of the idea of developing a JEDI quality assurance model for the Youth Sector?
8. What do you see as the priority EDI issues for the Youth Sector in Northern Ireland over the next 5 years?
9. What support will youth organisations need to address these issues?
10. What if any, sort of regional initiative is required in the future to address these issues?

JEDI



### **Interviewees**

Gerard Doran, SELB/WELB

Walker Ewart, Education and Training Inspectorate

Bill Fleming & Stephen Turner, National Council of YMCAs of Ireland

Jacqueline Irwin, Community Relations Council

Nichola Lynagh, NI Council for Integrated Education

Geraldine McGreevy, Belfast Education & Library Board

Louise Ward Hunter, Department of Education



## Appendix II: Focus Groups

### JEDI Focus Group Questions

1. What does Joined in Equity Diversity and Interdependence mean to you?
2. How relevant is EDI to your day-to-day work?
3. What initiatives on EDI has your organisation undertaken?
4. Why has your organisation undertaken or not undertaken EDI initiatives?
5. What have been the successes, barriers and benefits?
6. To what extent have quality assurance models been effective in supporting your organisation to address issues of equity, diversity and interdependence in Northern Ireland?
7. To what extent do you think EDI could and should be mainstreamed into existing quality assurance models?
8. What do you see as the priority EDI issues for youth workers in Northern Ireland over the next 5 years?
9. What support will your organisation need to address these issues?
10. What if any, sort of regional initiative is required in the future to address these issues?

JEDI



### **JEDI Focus Group Participants**

#### **Voluntary Sector Focus Group: 25 January 2008**

Ben Craig, Ocean Trust

Tanya Kirk, Wheelworks

Laura McFall, Public Achievement

Fiona Nelson, Playboard

#### **Statutory Sector Focus Group: 26 February 2008**

Michael Robinson, SEELB, Down

Jason Jordan, NEELB, Antrim Youth Projects

Leigh Whitley, NEELB, Glengormley Youth Centre

Francis Duff, BELB, Fortwilliam Youth Club

Paul McCrory, BELB, Doyle Youth Club

Ann Rankin, BELB, Glencairn Youth Initiative

Lynsey Cathcart, WELB, Limavady Youth Office

Stephen Quigley, WELB Derry,



JEDI

Richard O'Neil, WELB, Fermanagh

Eamon Fleming, SELB, Brownlow Craigavon

Adrian Hodginson, SELB

**Voluntary Sector Focus Group: 7 March 2008**

Clare Conlon, YouthAction NI

Kathleen Lavery, The Bytes Project

Heather McNamee, NI Youth Forum

Bernie O'Neill, FACE Inclusion Matters

John Peacock, Youth Link

Sinclair Trotter, Scouting Ireland