



Northern Ireland
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Youth provision: a brief overview

1 Introduction

This briefing note provides a short overview of youth provision in Northern Ireland. It is prepared to aid Committee for Education consideration of potential areas for inquiry, and is not intended to be comprehensive.

2 The majority of youth provision is voluntary

The Department of Education's investment in youth work aims to support and encourage young people to reach their potential.¹

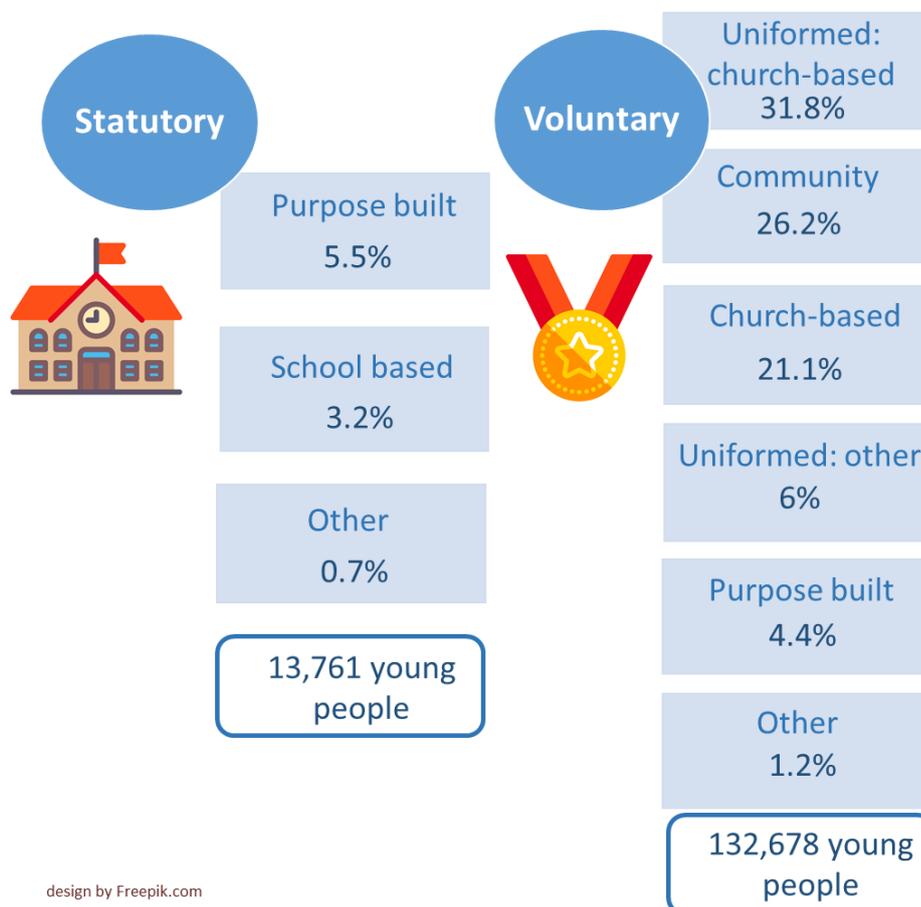
In 2014 146,439 people participated in youth provision. There are two sectors: a small statutory sector comprising 50 purpose-built facilities, 36 school-based facilities and 11 outdoor education centres; and a large voluntary sector incorporating over 1,700 facilities.²

¹ Department of Education *Youth Service* [online] Available at: <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/articles/youth-service>

² Youth Council for Northern Ireland (2014) *A Statistical and Geographic Report of the Registered Youth Service in Northern Ireland: 2014 data cycle* and Department of Education (2013) *Priorities for Youth* Bangor: Department of Education

Figure 1 below illustrates the different types of youth facilities in Northern Ireland, highlighting their levels of membership (in terms of the proportion of all young people attending youth provision).

Figure 1: Youth facilities in Northern Ireland and membership in 2014³



As Figure 1 highlights, uniformed, church-based provision makes up almost a third (31.8%) of youth sector membership, followed by voluntary, community based provision. In terms of youth membership:⁴

- Just over a third are from a Roman Catholic background, compared to 64% who come from a Protestant background;⁵ and
- In comparison to their representation in the wider youth population, Travellers and young people from an Afro-Caribbean ethnic background are considerably overrepresented, while young people from a Chinese and Asian background have less representation.

³ Youth Council for Northern Ireland (2014) *A Statistical and Geographic Report of the Registered Youth Service in Northern Ireland: 2014 data cycle*

⁴ Youth Council for Northern Ireland (2014) *A Statistical and Geographic Report of the Registered Youth Service in Northern Ireland: 2014 data cycle*

⁵ Please note that due to data supply issues, these figures may not be entirely accurate

3 Youth provision can be beneficial for young people

Youth work operates mainly within local neighbourhoods, engaging young people both within and outside the school setting. However, it has a clear connection to formal education.⁶

The Department of Education suggests that youth work is relevant to all young people, but particularly to those who may become disaffected and disengaged from school and society, those at risk of committing an offence, and those affected by the legacy of the conflict.⁷ The strategic aims of youth work are to:⁸

- Contribute to raising standards and closing the performance gap by providing access to non-formal learning opportunities; and
- Continue to improve the non-formal learning environment by creating inclusive, participative settings.

4 Inspection evidence points to good quality youth provision

The Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) inspects statutory and voluntary youth provision funded by the Department of Education.

Inspection evidence paints a mostly positive picture of youth provision, with 92% of settings inspected in 2012-14 evaluated as good or very good. *The Chief Inspector's Report* also highlights the ongoing development of partnerships between the youth and compulsory education sectors as positive, noting that this enables young people to make connections across their educational experiences.⁹

There is also evidence that young people have used transferable skills and accreditation from their involvement in youth work to progress into other education and training opportunities.¹⁰

5 However, some challenges remain

The ETI reports that youth work staff require more professional development opportunities. It also notes that partnerships between the youth sector and formal education require further development in order to address key priorities identified in *Priorities for Youth*.¹¹ Specifically, there is evidence that skills gained through youth provision are not strongly linked to those developed in school.¹²

⁶ Harland, K., McCready, S. (2012) *Taking Boys Seriously – A longitudinal study of adolescent male school-life experiences in Northern Ireland* Bangor: Department of Education

⁷ Department of Education (2013) *Priorities for Youth* Bangor: Department of Education

⁸ Department of Education (2013) *Priorities for Youth* Bangor: Department of Education

⁹ Education and Training Inspectorate (2014) *The Chief Inspector's Report 2012-2014* Bangor: ETI

¹⁰ Education and Training Inspectorate (2014) *The Chief Inspector's Report 2012-2014* Bangor: ETI

¹¹ Education and Training Inspectorate (2014) *The Chief Inspector's Report 2012-2014* Bangor: ETI

¹² Department of Education (2013) *Priorities for Youth* Bangor: Department of Education

6 The *Tackling Paramilitary Activity* Action Plan includes youth work

The Executive's Action Plan for *Tackling Paramilitary Activity, Criminality and Organised Crime* includes two recommendations relating to youth work.¹³

Table 1: Tackling Paramilitary Activity actions for youth services

Recommendation	Youth service action
The Executive should commission initiatives aimed at promoting lawfulness in schools and through youth work in communities	The Department of Education and Executive Office will deliver youth intervention programmes specifically targeted at vulnerable young people , including those most at risk of becoming involved in, or affected by paramilitary activity, so that they can make a positive contribution to their communities.
The Executive should use all avenues available to it to increase public awareness of what people can do about criminality in Northern Ireland and promote active citizenship in building a culture of lawfulness.	The Department of Education will consider commissioning the development of additional curriculum materials to support teachers and youth workers in delivering these aspects of the curriculum.

7 Youth Council for Northern Ireland functions have transferred to the Education Authority

On the 1st April 2016 the funding and support functions previously belonging to the Youth Council for Northern Ireland (YCNI) transferred to the Education Authority. However, legislation is required to repeal the 1989 Order to dissolve the YCNI, so it remains in effect. Its responsibilities were to:

- Advise the Department, EA and others on the development of the youth service;
- Encourage youth service cross-community activity;
- Encourage the provision of facilities for the youth services; and
- Encourage and assist coordination and efficient use of resources.

8 Conclusion

The youth service has a large membership in Northern Ireland, particularly within the voluntary sector. The Department and the Executive view youth services as having an

¹³ The Executive Office (2016) *Tackling Paramilitary Activity, Criminality and Organised Crime - Executive Action Plan* Belfast: The Executive Office

important part to play in developing young people, and in relation to wider objectives, such as reducing paramilitary activity. Areas for consideration could include:

- Participation in youth services by Section 75 groups, for example, the larger proportion of Protestants than Catholics in youth service membership;
- How, if at all, the Department and other bodies seek to boost participation in youth work among the most disenfranchised young people;
- The availability of professional development opportunities for youth workers, including the large number of volunteers;
- What actions the Department is taking to improve partnerships and links between formal and non-formal education;
- What youth intervention programmes and other actions the Department is taking to address its responsibilities within the *Tackling Paramilitary Activity* action plan; and
- The transfer of functions from the YCNI to the EA.

