

# Education and Training Inspectorate

## An Evaluation by the Education and Training Inspectorate of the “niyouthinfo.org” website

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Providing Inspection Services for  
Department of Education  
Department for Employment and Learning  
Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE



CUSTOMER SERVICE EXCELLENCE

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In this report, proportions may be described as percentages, common fractions and in more general quantitative terms. Where more general terms are used, they should be interpreted as follows:

Almost/nearly all	-	more than 90%
Most	-	75%-90%
A majority	-	50%-74%
A significant minority	-	30%-49%
A minority	-	10%-29%
Very few/a small number	-	less than 10%

In assessing the various features of the provision, Inspectors relate their evaluations to six descriptors as set out below:

DESCRIPTOR
Outstanding
Very Good
Good
Satisfactory
Inadequate
Unsatisfactory

## 1. CONTEXT

1.1 The niyouthinfo website is a cross-sectoral project under the direction of the Inter-Board Youth Information Panel and currently managed by the Western Education and Library Board (WELB) through a Memorandum of Understanding (see Appendix). The project's current steering group (the Panel) consists of representatives from the five Education and Library Boards (ELBs), the Youth Council for Northern Ireland, Youthnet, and the Northern Ireland Youth Forum (NIYF). The project originally made an application to the Department of Education (DE) for funding from the Executive Programme Fund (EPF) in October 2002 to develop the niyouthinfo website.

1.2 In its original proposal to secure funding from the EPF, the project outlined how it could respond to the priorities identified in the then Programme for Government. These priorities included promoting social inclusion, investing in education and skills, contributing towards community relations and developing North/South Relations. These priorities and others within the proposal, reflect similar priorities within youth work. Under investing in skills and education, for example, the original proposal stated how it could, by means of an information website, 'assist and support the socially excluded to enable them to enter or return to the workforce through youth service initiatives'. The original proposal also envisaged that each partner organisation would provide local information to a generic site, which would have a portal to each partner. It was anticipated that the young people would have access to the information they required through the partners' icon or through a 'touch' map. The website could be downloaded onto a CD-ROM for those youth organisations or groups who did not have internet access. One of the conditions of approval by DE was that arrangements were in place to monitor and evaluate the project.

1.3 In 2005 the project's strategy was updated in response to the Youth Work Strategy for Northern Ireland, which identified the objectives and targets for its implementation, and also those agencies which would take a lead in the range of working groups established.

A working group was set up with two specific tasks, namely 'to develop and launch a youth information website, and to develop a youth information strategy for Northern Ireland.' The Panel assumed responsibility for the working group and from 2005 the project became an on-line service to meet the information needs of young people between the ages of 14-25 years.

Since 2003 the website has received annual funding from DE; to date it has received £383,000.<sup>1</sup>

1.4 The project employs one full-time and one part-time member of staff on one-year fixed-term contracts. The full-time member of staff ensures that the information on the website is relevant, accurate and current. The part-time member of staff is the website designer and, at the time of the inspection, had been in post for only a number of months. Currently there is no direct input by youth workers to the website.

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<sup>1</sup> The actual amounts received each year are as follows:

2003/04 £40,000  
2004/05 £43,000  
2005/06 £53,000  
2006/07 £60,000  
2007/08 £61,000  
2008/09 £63,000  
2009/10 £63,000

## **2. LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT**

2.1 The main objective of the Panel is ensuring the effectiveness and success of the website. Each partner has subscribed to the Memorandum of Understanding which sets out the minimum requirements, the commitment and the expectations of supporting relevant work within his or her own organisation to develop and deliver the service for young people.

2.2 The deputy head of the WELB Youth Service manages the staff. The Panel provides governance of the project. The Youth Council for Northern Ireland (YCNi) is affiliated to the European Youth Information and Counselling Agency (ERYICA) allowing the project access to this agency.<sup>2</sup>

2.3 The Panel held six meetings between September 2007-May 2009; on average, five of the eight Panel members attended each meeting. These meetings are central to the planning for the development of the website. The Panel members have not fulfilled adequately their commitment and expected work within their own organisations as stated in the Memorandum of Understanding. In particular the Panel has not been able to address adequately the absence of a young people's advisory group through the participation of which the relevance and need for the website could be assured.

2.4 The project staff have promoted the use of the website across each ELB and requested comments regarding the content of the website. However, the youth workers within the participating organisations have not been involved sufficiently in either supporting or advising on the content of the website or in enabling the young people's participation in shaping it.

2.5 The Panel has made minimal use of its involvement in ERYICA through the YCNi. The staff and a small number of young people have attended conferences and workshops in Europe to examine other models of youth information. It is unclear how this involvement has benefited the website.

2.6 The annual strategy contains the themes and priorities identified by the members of the Panel including: the development of the Northern Ireland Youth Information Service; the increased accessibility to information and promotion of [niyouthinfo.org](http://niyouthinfo.org) as an information service; the development of a comprehensive, coherent and coordinated youth information service which takes account of the specific needs of the young people; the promotion of the participation of young people in the planning, management, delivery and evaluation of [niyouthinfo.org](http://niyouthinfo.org); and increasing the youth workers' awareness and promotion of [niyouthinfo.org](http://niyouthinfo.org). The project staff produce a quarterly and annual report for the Panel and DE. These reports contain statistical information with limited analysis of how far the strategy has been implemented and of the users of the website. The DE has not provided any response to the content of these reports.

## **3. QUALITY OF PROVISION**

3.1 The website sets out to inform, advise and guide young people about the issues they face and to encourage them to participate fully in society. It contains over 700 relevant articles which are regularly updated and the organisation distributes newsletters, and posters to over 500 youth organisations, schools and libraries each term. The website categorises its information under nine headings.

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<sup>2</sup> A network of youth information and counselling organisations which encourages innovation and good practice in youth information work and promotes staff training and professional exchanges, as well as the circulation of ideas and methods among its members.

3.2 The homepage is updated weekly with new items and topics from the message board and features articles which are current and important for young people. Articles such as 'being safe on bebo' and a list of 'helplines', for example, were featured on the website in response to the increased number of suicides among young people. The Panel has established strategic partnerships with a range of other relevant agencies including the Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB), as a result of which the website provides a range of relevant and accurate information for young people on areas such as housing and consumer rights. However, given the lack of participation by the young people, the website has made minimal progress to ensure evaluative comment from the young people on the relevance of the site's content.

3.3 There is little evidence that niyouthinfo.org is an integral part of an overall youth information strategy which connects with other youth provision. Other organisations within the youth sector are providing a similar service and there is, therefore, a duplication of resources.

3.4 The staff hold promotional and information visits to shopping centres, 'fresher days' at colleges and universities to raise awareness of the website. These personal contacts have a positive effect on the number of website users immediately after this outreach activity.

3.5 Between 2005 and 2010, the number of visitors to the website has increased year on year. Since 2006 the number of website users has risen from an average of just under 3,000 a month to just over 17,000 in October 2008, with 14,619 of them being first time visitors. It is not possible to record or analyse the details of the users by, for example age, gender or geographical location, or their reason for accessing the site.

### **3.6 CHILD PROTECTION**

The website implements the WELB guidelines for pastoral care and child protection. The website has satisfactory arrangements in place for safeguarding its users. These arrangements broadly reflect the guidance issued by the DE. All staff are vetted and have completed the three-hour 'Keeping Safe' training course as apart of their induction. The online child protection policy statement is displayed on the website. The website provides the opportunity for young people to ask questions or to seek advice on any topic. It has an extensive referral network and the researcher ensures that the questions are answered and advice given within one working day. Many of these enquiries are in relation to formal education, work, or accommodation and require information related to other websites.

## **4. OUTCOMES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE**

4.1 There is a lack of clarity about the improvement in outcomes for young people whom the website is intended to support. The website does not have the necessary software to provide a useful profile of those who use it, and this in turn makes it difficult to ascertain the benefits that accrue from it. There is little other evidence available from any monitoring by the Panel or from inspections of the youth service provision by the Education and Training Inspectorate to demonstrate the contribution which the website makes in informing young people of the opportunities available to them. Its potential benefit is limited by the lack of structure to involve young people in the planning and the delivery of the website. The Panel reports that it is difficult to maintain continuous support from across the youth service to sustain a representative and inclusive group of young people.

## **5. SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS**

### **5.1 STRENGTHS**

The strengths include the:

- good quality and technical expertise of the website staff; and
- relevant and accurate on-line information;

### **5.2 AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT**

There is a need:

- to ensure the young people's involvement in the design and delivery of the website;
- for more effective and strategic contribution by the Panel members and the youth organisations which they represent, both to support and to advise on the content and use of the website; and
- to evaluate more effectively the uptake and usage of the website, to ensure that it is of benefit to young people and represents value for money.

## **6. CONCLUSION**

6.1 In spite of the significant body of up-to-date information on the website, the quality of provision is inadequate. The inspection has identified significant areas for improvement both in the extent to which the website has fulfilled its original remit in having young people involved in its design and delivery, and in the absence of any significant evaluation of the benefits of the website over the seven years of its existence. These issues need to be addressed if the needs of the young people as envisaged by the purpose of the project, are to be met more effectively.

6.2 The Education and Training Inspectorate will monitor and report on the organisation's progress in addressing the areas for improvement over a 12-18 month period.

## **MEMBERSHIP OF THE NORTHERN IRELAND YOUTH INFORMATION PANEL**

### **BECOMING A MEMBER/PARTNER OF THE PANEL**

#### **Minimum requirements**

Potential members of the panel must convince existing members that their organisation:

- has an active interest in Youth Information;
- has structure(s) in place to collate and disseminate youth information, and that all young people have access to relevant, current and accurate information (May include computer facilities, internet access, youth information centre/service, youth information points in youth clubs/schools/libraries, newsletter, magazine, phone-in service);
- has named a designated worker with responsibility for youth information to attend meetings and assist the panel in its work;
- has read, and is prepared to sign up to, the European Charter for Youth Information; and
- has committed to operate by the Standards and Quality Assurance in Youth Information.

### **STAYING AS A PARTNER/MEMBER**

Each member must commit to:

- attend at least 4 meetings out of 6 per year;
- contribute to the work of the Panel by accepting nomination to working parties, where appropriate; and
- accept rotational positions on the Panel

### **MINIMUM WORK EXPECTATIONS AT BASE**

The Designated Youth Information Worker is expected to:

- establish youth information service(s) for and by young people;
- ensure that young people are the major stakeholders in the management and delivery of Youth Information;
- Identify the needs of young people in the designated geographical (or organisational, or Board) area;
- define the level of current delivery of youth information;

- set out a developmental plan for delivery of youth information;
- contribute to the web site by supplying local information in the format(s) requested; and
- supply annual report and statistics to the Panel for use in funding applications and reports to funders.

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