

# YOUTH INSPECTION



Education and Training  
Inspectorate

Northern Ireland Youth Forum

Report of an inspection in  
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The Education and Training Inspectorate  
Promoting Improvement

Providing inspection services for:

Department of Education  
Department for the Economy  
and other commissioning Departments

CUSTOMER  
SERVICE  
EXCELLENCE



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## 1. Context

The Northern Ireland Youth Forum (NIYF) is a regional voluntary youth led organisation, founded in 1979 by the Department of Education (DE) to promote greater participation of young people in the youth service. The role of the NIYF was outlined in paragraph 12 of DE Circular 1979/10, which was withdrawn subsequently on the publication of Priorities for Youth<sup>1</sup>. The Education Authority (EA) have taken the responsibility for the monitoring of the NIYF since 2014. The NIYF is also the lead partner, with four other youth organisations, in the Network for Youth (NfY) set up to develop a model for strengthening participation in the youth service at local, sub-regional and regional levels. It also receives additional funding from various funders including Special European Peace Building Peace IV programme, Big Lottery and Tutor Trust to provide programmes for young people with particular needs and interests.

The NIYF is managed by an executive committee which is made up entirely of young people, elected every two years by its membership. Any young person aged between 11 and 25 can become a member of the NIYF provided they reside in Northern Ireland for 70% of the time. According to figures supplied by the organisation the current membership is 2,213 a slight decrease over the past two years. The NIYF employs a Director, Head of Operations, support staff and 12 full-time youth workers employed through the various funding streams.

## 2. Focus of the inspection

The inspection focused on:

- the outcomes for the young people;
- the quality of the provision; and
- the quality of leadership and management.

## 3. Overall findings of the inspection

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>Capacity to identify and bring about improvement</b>
<b>Outcomes for learners</b>	Very good
<b>Quality of provision</b>	Good
<b>Leadership and management</b>	Good

## 4. Outcomes for learners

The young people demonstrate very good communication skills, initiative and self-reliance. They build trust in one another and develop effective working relationships, share important information and experiences to solve problems and deal with issues important to them involving housing and homelessness, addiction and mental health. The very good quality of the young people's work in the various programmes is characterised by high levels of co-operation and mutual trust.

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<sup>1</sup> Priorities for Youth is the Department of Education policy for youth work

As a result of their involvement with the NIYF the young people make significant progress and report an enhanced capacity for effective learning. They are justly proud of their achievements through the accredited and non-accredited programmes. According to data provided by the organisation, 12 members of the executive committee have received appropriate training for their roles including, induction, recruitment and selection, finance, and child protection training. Additionally approximately 120 young people have successfully achieved accredited training in a wide range of courses up to and including level two in: peer mentoring and youth work, civic empowerment, first aid and food hygiene.

A significant minority of the current executive committee have progressed from NIYF programmes to leadership roles within the organisation. The option to co-opt young people from other programmes is being appropriately considered by the executive committee. While the participation of young people across each level of the organisation is a key strength of the youth provision, there is a need to demonstrate more effectively how the young people can progress to the NIYF executive from other programme areas.

The young people develop a critical understanding of the issues which have the potential to affect adversely their lives, for example, the Elephant in The Room<sup>2</sup> initiative which helps to address young people's mental health concerns. The young people display highly effective inter-personal skills to influence and motivate others to become involved in and support the aims and objectives of their campaigns. They develop strategies designed skilfully to build consensus and to influence government departments and policy makers. In discussions, the young people spoke of their plans for the future with a degree of optimism not apparent to them before they joined the programmes. They described their involvement in the NIYF as giving them purpose and direction in their lives. The young people begin their journeys from a variety of individual starting points and many present with increasingly complex needs. Many of them are overcoming significant barriers to learning in their lives, including, in a small number of cases, low levels of literacy.

## **5. Quality of provision**

The curriculum developed by the NIYF for the young people is appropriate and matched well to the young people's needs and aspirations; the young people are involved actively in the design of their own curriculum. In particular, opportunities are devised to lead programmes and campaigns that are important to them and address issues including equity, diversity and concerns around independent living. The NIYF works effectively in collaboration with young people who have significant barriers to continuing their education, training or employment. Other funded projects including using the medium of mixed martial arts to engage with young people from specific communities with recognised personal and social issues. Importantly the NIYF has developed good working links with youth forums from three council areas. Contemporary programmes including Black History Month<sup>3</sup> are inclusive and provide appropriate challenge for the young people involved which contributes well to raising standards.

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<sup>2</sup> The Elephant in the Room is a mental health initiative for young people developed in partnership with the Belfast City Council youth forum.

<sup>3</sup> Black History Month is a social not-for-profit initiative, with a vision of creating a unity of purpose and advancement where different communities can share together to experience with each other's history, arts, cultures, and heritages to be able to co-exist together meaningfully and productively.

There is a cohesive team of staff and management who support effectively young people to ensure their voices are heard. Good links have been established with Translink and the Northern Ireland Housing Executive to allow for young people's issues and concerns to be raised, listened to and discussed. Young people are also appropriately represented in the regional advisory group and other interagency groups. While there are a small number summative assessments of sessions, the staff need to demonstrate more effectively how these are used to inform future planning and future youth work delivery.

In the sessions observed there is effective support for young people to help them progress through suitable progression pathways to the next stage of their learning and development. The sessions ranged from outstanding to having important areas for improvement and were mostly good. In the best practice, the youth workers use: effective facilitation skills; flexibility in the planning of sessions; pace that is well matched to the ability levels of the group; and effective individual support to those young people who are having difficulty in their learning. The young people from the executive committee use effective peer learning strategies as a key feature of the sessions observed and challenge each other appropriately. In the less effective practice there were not enough strategies to address challenging behaviour and the input from the youth work staff was too long which led to poor quality learning experiences for the young people.

Based on the evidence available at the time of the inspection, the organisation's approach to the care and welfare of the young people impacts positively on learning, teaching and outcomes for learners. In almost all of the sessions the young people, irrespective of their backgrounds, demonstrated exemplary behaviour, respect and openness with the youth workers. The young people respond well to the safe and secure environment created by the youth workers and their peers which creates a purposeful learning experience for all.

## **6. Leadership and management**

One of the key strengths of the NIYF is that it is managed effectively by young people who are involved fully in the strategic planning and development of the organisation. Appropriate training and support has been provided for the 12 person executive committee not only on developing the young people's management skills but also on providing peer support on campaigning and lobbying on key issues at a local, regional and international level. The young people are involved actively in influencing the direction of the organisation and in developing important strategies through for example the good work in highlighting the concerns of young people as outlined in their submission to the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). However, there is a need to continue to build the representative voice of young citizens through the further development of a wider group of young people from across the region.

The NIYF has developed and agreed with the EA, priorities for work and a monitoring structure that includes quarterly and annual monitoring reports that comprise of numerous areas for action identified in the priority areas for work document. However, there is a need to review the current areas for action so that they are more manageable, achievable and realistic for the organisation. In addition, there is not enough clarity on how the key actions, agreed under the terms of reference for the NIYF, are progressing.

The purposeful and effective partnerships are a key driver to the work of the NIYF. There is a need to ensure that these partnerships are complementary to the key aims of the NIYF and add value to the organisation's vision and mission. Open and transparent links with key partners are essential to avoid duplication of services. The partners who engaged with the members of the inspection team spoke positively about the work of the NIYF and in particular how well the organisation acts as an advocate for the voice of young people.

The NIYF has begun an appropriate process for quality assuring the youth and other work of the organisation through a research informed-model. While there is appropriate continuous development for the youth work staff, the young people, who have an essential management function, should also be given the opportunity, when appropriate, to understand better the how the process of quality assurance impacts on the pace of their learning.

## **7. Safeguarding**

Based on the evidence available at the time of the inspection, the arrangements for safeguarding young people reflect the guidance from the Department of Education. The young people report that they feel safe in the organisation and that they are aware of what to do if they have any concerns about their safety or welfare.

## **8. Overall effectiveness**

### **Overall effectiveness**

The Northern Ireland Youth Forum demonstrates the capacity to identify and bring about improvement in the interest of all the learners.

The main areas for improvement are to:

- continue to broaden and develop the representative voice of young people from across the region;
- review the current areas for action in the priority areas of work so that they are manageable, achievable and realistic for the organisation; and
- build upon the important start made by the organisation on self-evaluation to identify the actions and planning to bring about further improvement.

The ETI will continue to monitor how the organisation sustains improvement.

**Health and safety/accommodation**

There is an urgent need to ensure that the lift is in full working order to meet the needs of all of the young people.

## Statistical data

Table 1: Total Membership

Age group	9-13		14-18		19-21		22-25		Total
Gender	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	
Numbers 2016-17	45	43	342	375	381	462	465	479	2592
Numbers 2017-18	7	4	135	123	412	471	513	725	2390
Numbers 2018-19	5	6	378	432	297	393	196	506	2,213

**Source:** data as held by the organisation. \* fewer than 5.



### **Inspection methodology and evidence base**

The ETI's Inspection and Self-Evaluation Framework is available on the ETI website at [The Inspection and Self-Evaluation Framework \(ISEF\): Youth](#)

Inspectors observed youth work sessions and also held focus group discussions with the young people. The inspectors held discussions with representatives of the Education Authority management, staff, young people and other stakeholders. In addition, the inspectors scrutinised the youth workers' planning and the organisation's self-evaluation reports. The inspectors evaluated the organisation's arrangements for safeguarding young people.

## Reporting terms used by the Education and Training Inspectorate

### Quantitative terms

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%

### Performance levels

The ETI use the following performance levels when reporting on outcomes for learners, quality of provision and leadership and management:

Outstanding
Very good
Good
Important area(s) for improvement
Requires significant improvement
Requires urgent improvement

### Overall effectiveness

The ETI use one of the following inspection outcomes when evaluating the overall effectiveness of the organisation:

The organisation has a high level of capacity for sustained improvement in the interest of all the learners. The ETI will monitor how the organisation sustains improvement.
The organisation demonstrates the capacity to identify and bring about improvement in the interest of all the learners. The ETI will monitor how the organisation sustains improvement.
The organisation needs to address (an) important area(s) for improvement in the interest of all the learners. The ETI will monitor and report on the organisation's progress in addressing the area(s) for improvement. There will be a formal follow-up inspection.
The organisation needs to address urgently the significant areas for improvement identified in the interest of all the learners. It requires external support to do so. The ETI will monitor and report on the organisation's progress in addressing the areas for improvement. There will be a formal follow-up inspection.

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