

A Handy Guide

to the

Youth Work Act

and

***National Youth Work
Development Plan***



**A Handy Guide to the Youth Work Act
and National Youth Work Development Plan
by the National Youth Federation
and Co. Tipperary (N.R.) VEC**

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Disclaimer

Although every effort has been made to ensure that the information in this manual is as accurate and up to date as is possible, at the time of going to print, the National Youth Federation and Co. Tipperary (N.R.) VEC cannot accept responsibility or liability for any errors or omissions. For precise legal information on the **Youth Work Act 2001** please refer to the text of the Act itself.

Introduction

The implementation of the Youth Work Act 2001 and the National Youth Work Development Plan are perhaps the most significant developments in youth work provision in Ireland for some considerable time.

Both have been developed with the aim of assisting Youth Service agencies (and the clubs, projects, centres and services they operate) and indeed Local Voluntary Youth Councils and VECs to be able to work in partnership to ensure the highest and most comprehensive quality of service is delivered for young people.

While the Act and the Plan are clear and comprehensive it seemed useful to provide a concise and abbreviated version for easy reference. It is likely that many youth workers and VEC staff will appreciate this accessible publication in their day-to-day work.

Every effort has been made to summarise the text of both publications and to provide additional information without loss of accuracy. It is important however, to recognise that the only full and accurate sources are the Act and Plan themselves and that these will be supplemented at some point in the future by way of guidance provided by the Minister.

There are four main sections to this guide; a summary of the National Youth Work Development Plan 2003–2007: a summary of The Youth Work Act 2001: notes on establishing Voluntary Youth Councils and notes on designation of Local Voluntary Youth Work Organisations. These were, we felt, the most important aspects for ‘popular consumption’.

We are particularly happy that this publication is the result of a partnership between a VEC and a voluntary youth service organisation. Hopefully, this will herald the development of many more strategic and collaborative partnerships between the statutory and voluntary sectors and act as a template for continued co-operation in providing young people in Ireland with the best possible youth service.



A Summary

The National Youth Work Development Plan 2003–2007 is the major statement of Government Policy on Youth Work in Ireland. It is one of the significant developments following from the Youth Work Act 2001.

Society

Part One of the Plan sets out the context. It draws attention to the rapidly changing nature of society in Ireland today in which youth work operates. Economically Ireland has changed immensely since the early 1990s, events such as the Good Friday Agreement and further European integration are seen as major political changes. Technology has also had a major impact on young peoples' lives. The advent of a more multi-cultural society is also seen as hugely significant as has been continued urbanisation.

Young People

Young people themselves are seen as undergoing major change both culturally and demographically. After a period throughout the 1980s and 1990s whereby the percentage of young people in Ireland was steadily declining due to lower birth rates, this trend is about to be reversed. The latest demographic indicators from the Central Statistics Office predict that in the

period from 2001–2016 the number of young people could rise by as much as 26.5%. Even the lowest predictors still expect an increase of 11.9% in this period.

In addition to this, young people are becoming more culturally diverse while the concepts of childhood, youth and adulthood are becoming more and more blurred. Transitions between different stages are no longer as simple – for example, it is more common for young people to work and study at the same time today than in the past. Young people have more choices and this can be positive and negative. The dominance of individualism and consumerism is a challenge to young people and youth work. The Plan also emphasises the importance of social solidarity between young and old in a society where the dependency ratio will increase.

The Policy Context

The Plan follows several previous policy initiatives in the 1970s and 80s. The Costello Committee Final Report in 1984 strongly influenced the move towards the 2001 Youth Work Act. The Green and White Papers on Education in the 1990s had some bearing on the area. The 2001 Act¹ provides the legal basis now for youth work in Ireland.

Other policy developments at the national level, which are seen as relevant, are:

- The **National Development Plan 2000–2006** and its Local Development and Social Inclusion Programme and measures to tackle educational disadvantage
- The **National Children’s Strategy 2000–2010** which provides for a greater direct voice for children and young people and enhanced research on their needs
- **Children First: National Guidelines for the Protection and Welfare of Children, 1999**
- Changes in Local Government and Local Development, particularly the evolution of the County and City Development Boards
- **Supporting Voluntary Activity: A White Paper on a Framework for Supporting Voluntary Activity and for Developing the Relationship between the State and the Community and Voluntary Sector, 2000**

¹ See Youth Work Act Summary on page 14.

- The RAPID programme aimed at fast tracking investment in areas of disadvantage
- The Development of a **National Qualifications Framework** under the *Qualifications (Education and Training) Act, 1999* establishing The **NQA** (National Qualifications Authority), **HETAC** (Higher Education Training and Awards Council) and **FETAC** (Further Education Training and Awards Council).
- The **National Drugs Strategy 2001–2008**
- **National Health Promotion Strategy 2000–2005**
- **Equal Status Act 2000**
- **European Commission White Paper on Youth Policy – *A New Impetus for European Youth, 2001***

Challenges for Youth Work

The Plan describes these as:

- Recruiting and retaining adults as volunteers
- Attracting and sustaining the interest and involvement of young people
- Maintaining relevance given the changing environment outlined in the plan
- Ensuring youth work can compete with other forms of provision for young people
- Responding to relevant developments and being efficient, effective and equitable

Vision for Youth Work

The Plan Takes its definition of youth work from the 2001 Act:

“a planned programme of education designed for the purpose of aiding and enhancing the personal and social development of young persons through their voluntary participation, and which is –

- (a) complementary to their formal, academic or vocational education and training; and*
- (b) provided primarily by voluntary youth work organisations”*

The plan particularly emphasises the developmental and educational nature of youth work, the centrality of voluntary organisations and the voluntary participation of young people. While there are many methods employed by youth work organisations they all share in a process of ongoing experience, observation, reflection and action on the critical participation of young people.

The vision section strongly emphasises the point that youth work is a profession; youth work is for all young people and should be a collaboration between young people and adults. Specific attention is drawn to **Articles 12 and 13 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child** and their reference to taking young peoples views into account. Youth work should work to combat discrimination and there is a need to ensure adequate co-ordination of services.

Goals and Actions

The Plan sets out 4 goals and a series of actions under each goal. The actions have been set out at the end of this section.

1. To facilitate young people and adults to participate more fully in, and to gain optimum benefit from, youth work programmes and services.

The plan pays tribute to the amount of work done in this area on limited resources, it recognises the major challenges of participation connected to age, decision-making and ownership. There are increased burdens on organisations and volunteers.

2. To enhance the contribution of youth work to social inclusion, social cohesion and active citizenship in a rapidly changing national and global context.

The plan envisages a balance between social integration and individual personal development in youth work. Organisations are trying to work with groups who have previously had little attention. Youth work should contribute towards the building of a multicultural society and north south reconciliation while working in an international context. It should contribute to civic, social and political education.

3. To put in place an expanded and enhanced infrastructure for development, support and coordination at national and local level.

Research and consultation for the plan led to a number of issues and concerns about the legislative framework. These related to the resourcing of Youth Affairs, co-ordination with other related policy areas and provision, the need to have regard to the experience of existing local voluntary youth councils, the lack of agreed salary scales and employment conditions in the sector, the lack of facilities and proper funding and reporting arrangements.

Several actions as follows are laid out under the four goals

NYWDP Actions	
1.1a	Funding Review
1.1b	Youth Club Grant Scheme
1.1c	Youth Work Assessor
1.1d	Youth Work Development Unit
1.2	Rural Youth Work
1.3	Peace 1 Projects
1.4	Active participation of young people
1.5	Adoption of best practice
1.6	Charter of rights for young people
1.7	Peer Management projects*
1.8	Promoting and developing volunteerism
1.9a	Charter of rights for volunteers
1.9b	National Awards Scheme
1.10	Youth Information Centres
1.11	Health Strategy
1.12	Multi-agency professional services
1.13	High profile media vehicle
1.14	Support to organisations re info technology

2.1	Promotion of Equality and Inclusiveness
2.2	Equality Initiative
2.3	Multi Cultural Pilot Initiative
2.4	Social and Political Education Development Unit
2.5	International Youth Work
2.6	EU White Paper
2.7	Formal Participation of young people
2.8	North-South Dimension

4. To put in place mechanisms for enhancing professionalism and ensuring quality standards in youth work.

The plan points to a major need for developing the infrastructure relating to youth work regulation of who is and isn't a youth worker. It points to the great need for a validation body and more research in the sector.

NYWDP Actions	
3.1	Establishment of the Development Unit
3.2	Regional/local youth services
3.3	NYWAC sub-committee
3.4	NYWAC review working methods
3.5a	Resourcing NYWAC
3.5b	Resourcing VECs
3.6	Resourcing NYCI
3.7	Outcome of Funding Review
3.8	Three year funding cycle
3.9	Grant Scheme for Youth Clubs see 1.1b
3.10	Single worker projects (180)
3.11	Training and support on implementation
3.12	Capital Programme
3.13	Access to community/educational facilities
3.14	Review of Development Plan

4.1	Youth Work Validation Body
4.2	Once-off Training Initiative
4.3	National Registration Scheme
4.4	Debate on PAYW and Employers Body
4.5	Child Protection Guidelines
4.6	Good Practice Guidelines
4.7	Guidelines for Safety and Protection
4.8	Youth Research Programme
4.9	Common set of procedures for data

In the forward to the Plan the Minister of State for Youth Affairs, Ms Síle de Valera TD refers to five priority areas:

1. The Appointment of an **Assessor of Youth**,
2. The creation of a **Development Unit**,
3. The establishment of a **Funding Review Body**,
4. The setting up of a **Validation Body for Youth Work Training**,
5. the expansion of the **Local Youth Club Grant Scheme**.

Different models for a Development Unit for Youth Work are explored in Annex 1 of the Plan. Annex 2 sets out the remit of the Funding Review and Annex 3 examines the Validation Body for Youth Work Training.





A Summary*

The Youth Work Act became law in December 2001. Its intention was to provide a statutory footing for youth work in Ireland. The youth work sector was involved to a considerable degree in terms of consultation leading up to the act. Officials and successive ministers have stressed the importance and centrality of key principles in developing the act and policy. In general these have been:

- The importance of volunteers
- The definition of youth work
- The need for a legislative base

The Role of the Minister

The Act confers certain responsibilities on the Minister for Education and Science namely to develop and co-ordinate youth work programmes and services including co-ordination with education and other programmes. The Minister, or on a day to day basis the Minister of State for Youth Affairs, has exercised many of these functions previously but now they are placed on a legislative footing. The Act also allows the Minister to:

- Provide annual funding for youth work programmes and services
- Carry out research or to commission research in respect of youth work

- Monitor once a year the youth work programmes and services funded by the Vocational Education Committees (VECs)
- Provide for the assessment once every three years of state funded youth work programmes and services
- Appoint the National Youth Work Advisory Committee
- Give due regard to the treatment of males and females between the ages of 10 and 21 years and to those who are socially or economically disadvantaged
- Give due regard to the needs of young people in Gaelteacht areas and/or whose language is Irish; and
- Give direction to VECs or youth work organisations on how the Youthwork Programme or Service is delivered if this is required

National Youth Work Advisory Committee (NYWAC)

NYWAC has been in existence since 1997 arising out of the previous Youth Work Act, 1997. It has effectively been reconstituted under the 2001 Act. The Act provides for a membership of 31–33 consisting of:

- 2/3 Ministerial Nominees including the Chairperson
- 2 Representatives of the Department of Education and Science
- 8 Representatives from other Government Departments
- 4 Representatives from the Irish Vocational Education Association (IVEA)
- 15/16 representatives nominated by the National Youth Council of Ireland (NYCI)

The Committee assumes greater importance under the Act. It will advise the Minister on guidelines for VECs as to the constitution of Local Voluntary Youth Work Organisations and the standards to which they must adhere. The Committee must also advise the Minister on guidelines for the composition of the Local Voluntary Youth Councils and procedures regarding elections to them. The main function however will be to advise the Minister on proper co-ordination and development of services at a national level.

NYWAC has provided a useful forum for sharing information and exchanging views. Direct contact with the Department of Education officials and VEC officials is useful. There is a sub-committee of NYWAC looking at the Implementation of the Act.

Youth Work Assessor

The Act provides for the appointment of a Youth Work Assessor who will:

- Provide information on the state of the youth work sector
- Enable decision making on the basis of an assessment of youth work provision; and
- Enable VECs and the Minister to promote best practice and value for money

A major role of the Assessor will be to act as a safeguard in relation to all funding decisions and decisions on the designation of Youth Organisations.

The appointment of a Youth Work Assessor would mark a significant point in the implementation of the Act. The Assessor plays a key role in examining local and national plans and the overall quality of the services being delivered.

National Youth Work Development Plan (NYWDP)

One of the main functions of NYWAC is to produce a National Youth Work Development Plan. The plan is to serve as a guide to the delivery of youth work services over the period 2003–2007. The Plan is now published and thanks to some expert input is quite a robust document. While funding has been an issue in the past the last budget made substantial allocations in this area. A summary of the plan is also included in this guide. It can be downloaded from the youth affairs section of the department of education and science website www.education.ie.

The Role of the VECs

Some of the most significant provisions in the Act are those relating to the VECs. These are to be the mainstays in the state's support of youth work at local level. The Act Provides that:

- VECs must ensure that there is adequate provision of youth work programmes and services in co-ordination with voluntary youth organisations
- VECs will have to prepare a three year development plan for their areas
- VECs will be enabled to grant, withdraw or reduce financial assistance to Youth Work Organisations, and

- VECs will be enabled to arrange for the provision of Youth Work programmes and services where they are not being provided

VECs are to appoint specific sub-committees for youth work in their area, to be termed Youth Work Committees. The composition of these committees will be inclusive of both statutory and voluntary agencies. They are intended to act as an important advisory service to the VEC in all areas of youth work provision including the production of the three-year plan. It is anticipated that the Youth Work Committee will reflect the needs of the community in their area.

Some VECs have been more active than others in Youthwork. VECs with a strong tradition in Youth Work have appointed staff and continue to play an active role. It is thus a concern that as a result geographic differences may emerge in the funding and support for Youth Work.

Local Structures

Obviously from the above the VEC will become the central body in terms of local youth work both in terms of funding and status. The Youth Work Committees will be important local structures. The Act also provides for **Local Voluntary Youth Councils**, which are to provide a forum for youth work organisations in their locality and to advise on the implementation of the local plan.

These councils are to allow the voluntary sector have a role in decision making in their area. The Act stipulates that 75% of the membership of these committees should be volunteers and that at least one fifth of council members should be under the age of 25.

Youth Work Organisations

The Act provides for four categories of youth work providing organisations, three of these require recognition by the minister and one requires recognition by the VEC only.

Prescribed National Youth Work Representative Organisation

The organisation will be prescribed by ministerial order for three-year periods. Its principal role will be to nominate 50% of the membership of NYWAC. This is currently the National Youth Council of Ireland.

Approved National Youth Work Organisation

These are national organisations such as those currently in membership of the NYCI. They also interact with the VEC at local

level. It is envisaged that they will have representation on NYWAC through the Prescribed Representative Organisation. The Minister can revoke the status of Approved Organisation but the assessor must be involved in this decision.

Designated Local Youth Work Organisations

These organisations provide services at community level. In some cases they may be, members of or affiliated to, Approved Organisations. Where these organizations receive funding from the VEC the intention is they will receive designated status. These guidelines will come from the Minister on the advice of NYWAC, these organisations will form the electorate for the Local Voluntary Youth Councils and will be eligible to receive grant in aid from the VEC.

There is a continuing concern that issues such as scale and tradition be taken into account in this process.

Authorised Organisations

This will include consultants and international youth work providers. These are organisations that may arise for funding from time to time.

Youth Information

A sub-committee of NYWAC has been established. This is a worthwhile development as there has been little innovation or change in this area for a considerable time and the pace of change of information provision and ICTs means the area is in need of constant monitoring.

Child Protection

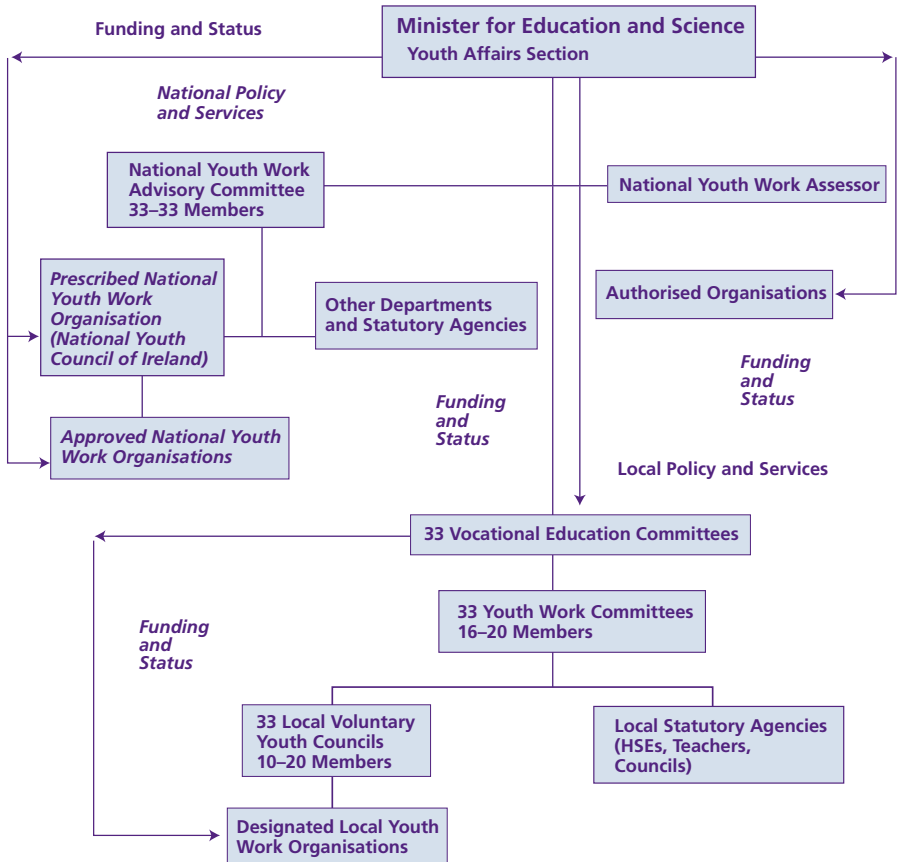
A child protection sub-committee of NYWAC has been established. It has drawn heavily on NYF material to produce a programme of training for relevant staff in the area. Funding problems have even arisen in this area. Even limited progress is to be welcomed.

Funding and the Youth Work Act

The early stages of the NYCI campaign on funding put a lot of emphasis on the Youth Work Act. However a change in emphasis has emerged. Core funding for the youth service is seen as the priority in a shopping list while implementation of the Youth Work

Act remains an objective. A good way of crystallising this might be to separate the two budgets. Thus any resources allocated to one should not affect the other or if this was to happen it would at least be transparent. Fortunately this has been the case with recent budget allocations.

The Youth Work Act (2001)



* Diagram and information drawn from P.J. Breen, *Ireland's Youth Policy for the New Millennium, The Youth Work Act, 2001, Forum 21 2003*



Under the Youth Work Act 2001 VECs are tasked with the establishment of Local Voluntary Youth Councils. They have a number of primary functions. Firstly, they will provide advice to the VEC on the preparation and implementation of the Development Plan. Secondly, they will act as a forum for local voluntary youth work organisations and finally they will nominate persons for appointment to a Youth Work Committee.

The VEC is tasked with running a number of information sessions on the implementation of the Act in advance of establishing the Council and with providing detailed guidance on the membership and operations of the Council.

Membership will be drawn from a number of youth work categories determined by the VEC and each category or 'constituency' will elect a representative to the council. The VEC will appoint a Returning Officer who will oversee the process and report in writing to the VEC on election results.

In addition to Youth Work Categories, electoral constituencies may also be determined by geography and this must be decided by the VEC.

The Council will have not less than 10 and not more than 20 members comprising of 10–15 members elected from ‘constituencies’ and up to 5 additional members elected by the 10–15 members from a selected list of candidates.

The VEC will present the first meeting of the Council a report showing how the following are represented:

- Volunteers
- Employees of designated local voluntary youth work organisations or other organisations
- Young people
- Males and females
- Those working with young Travellers
- Those working in the Irish Language (in Gaeltacht areas)

Youth Work Categories will probably include:

- Youth Work Service Providers
- Uniform Youth Work Programme Providers
- Youth Work Clubs and Groups
- Providers of Independently Managed Youth Work Projects
- Other Specialist Youth Work Programmes



Under the Youth Work Act 2001 the VEC has the right to designate organisations in their area. This designation will in turn become a condition for funding and for participation in elections for, or participation in the Local Voluntary Youth Council.

The VEC must notify the Minister when it designates a local voluntary youth work organisation.

In order to be designated, an organisation must comply with a set of conditions, which are most probably to include:

- Provision of a youth work programme as defined by the Act.
- Provision of a youth work programme to young persons under 25 years of age.
- Provision of a youth work programme within the VEC area.
- Having a constitution or other appropriate governance statement which confirms that the organisation is not for profit, has a voluntary management or leader group structure, maintains records of membership (including gender) or member organisations, attendance, records of meetings, accounts and health and safety standards.
- Having at least 8 registered and/or participating young people.

- Having guidelines for good youth work practice set out in respect of various age ranges, its policy on supervision of programmes and activities and an undertaking that it will comply with the Code of Good Practice in Child Protection for the Youth Work Sector 2002.
- Showing a commitment to involving young people in all aspects of the organisation, for example, in decision-making processes.
- Being voluntary in nature and committed to the voluntary participation of young people in programmes and services and encourage volunteerism of adults.
- Having clear financial records and systems and evidence that tax affairs are in order.
- Complying with the National Code of Good Practice on Child Protection.
- Showing a commitment to an ongoing commitment to training and development of volunteers and staff.
- Proving that programmes are provided on an ongoing and sustainable basis.
- Having appropriate and adequate insurance cover.

All of the above must be evidenced to the VEC through documentation and other means.

Glossary of Abbreviations

EU	European Union
FETAC	Further Education and Training Awards Council
HETAC	Higher Education and Training Awards Council
HSE	Health Service Executive (formerly Regional Health Boards)
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
IVEA	Irish Vocational Education Association
NQA	National Qualifications Authority
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
NYCI	National Youth Federation
NYWAC	National Youth Work Advisory Committee
NYWDP	National Youth Work Development Plan
PAYW	Professional Association of Youth Workers
RAPID	Revitalising Areas by Planning, Investment and Development
UN	United Nations
VEC	Vocational Education Committee
YWA	Youth Work Act