

# Diversity and Equality

## Introduction

Management committees and youth workers comment on how much their work has transformed as a result of the huge changes that Ireland has experienced in such a short time. These changes can include the range of people accessing our youth project/services and also Ireland's changing attitudes, laws and social influences.

Youth workers say these changes have direct impacts; not only on who they're engaging with and the work programmes they engage in and also on how they go about their work. Youth workers and youth projects/services have a duty not to discriminate on the grounds of disability, marital status, race, family status, membership of the travelling community, sexual orientation, religious belief, age and gender. Youth workers engage primarily with young people aged 10 – 21 years of age so all of these grounds have real relevance and implications for youth project/services.

This is a challenging but certainly not a negative development. The concept of diversity means that people are valued as individuals and this compliments good youth work practice. It promotes the belief that people from different backgrounds can bring fresh ideas and ways of thinking and this can make the manner in which youth work is delivered more inclusive and effective.

*'Diversity' refers to the diverse nature of Irish society, for example, in terms of social class, gender, returned Irish emigrants, family status, minority groups and the majority group.*

*'Equality' refers to the importance of recognising different individual needs and of ensuring equity in terms of access, participation and benefits for all young people and their families. It is about treating people in the same way while respecting their individual beliefs, culture, gender and ethnic origin.<sup>1</sup>*

Given the potential breadth and complexity of these issues, it is essential to have a diversity and equality policy. This will bring clear thinking and will facilitate inclusive youth work practice. It is recommended that your youth project/service should proof all other policies, procedures, guidelines and materials against your diversity and equality policy.

# Diversity and Equality

## Things to think about

When creating a policy in this area, the following questions are designed to get you thinking. They do not cover everything but should help to get you started.

### *Planning*

- Who should be involved in developing this policy?
- Who does this policy apply to?
- How might young people be involved in developing this policy?
- Will you need advice and information from other agencies with legal or other expertise?
- How will you ensure that the youth workers and other staff reflect and develop their practice in relation to this policy area?
- What training will be required for youth workers and other staff?
- How will your youth project/service keep up to date with relevant legislation and anti discriminatory practice e.g. language?
- How will you access relevant statistical information, regarding the profile of young people in your area, in order to develop a strategic plan for your youth project/service?
- How accessible is your youth project/service to young people and families from all backgrounds in your local community e.g. non English speakers?
- What barriers prevent young people from taking part in and benefiting from your youth project/service?
- How are you promoting your youth project/service to specific target groups e.g. minority ethnic groups?
- How aware are you about equality issues, do you need to learn more?
- How will youth workers ensure that the materials and programme activities are free of bias and applicable to a diverse range of young people?

### *Ensuring diversity and equality:*

- How will your youth project/service ensure that all policies, guidelines, protocols and materials are proofed against your diversity and equality policy?
- How will the youth project/service identify and address issues of cultural norms and sensitivities e.g. discipline?
- How will you identify opportunities for developing inclusive practice among the staff team?
- How will you manage the needs of diverse groups of young people within your youth project/service?
- How do you update programme materials/content to respond to the changing needs of young people in your area e.g. religion
- How will you monitor and respond to the changing demographics in your local area?
- Are there other services with which you can link in order to develop joint responses and/or support the work you are currently delivering with young people?
- What will happen if someone does not follow the diversity and equality policy?
- How will you deal with complaints in relation to issues of diversity and equality?
- What mechanisms are in place to support young people to avail of other appropriate services to meet their specific needs?
- How will youth workers apply this policy in a non discriminatory and culturally sensitive manner while respecting Irish law?

### *Recording and evaluation*

- How will youth workers record opportunities for learning and integrate the learning into their youth work practice?
- How will your youth project/service record complaints and the follow on responses?
- How will you ensure that the diversity and equality policy is measured and supports the work of the youth project/service?
- When will you review the policy?

### **Key things to ensure**

- All relevant stakeholders are involved in designing the policy
- That youth workers and other staff, young people and management committee members are updated on diversity and equality issues on an ongoing basis
- Discrimination and racism both direct and indirect are challenged by the youth project/service
- The diversity and equality policy is not applied in a tokenistic manner
- Irish cultural identity is valued and celebrated
- The youth project/services other policies are not in conflict with the diversity and equality policy

### **Relevant legislation/guidelines**

In designing any policy, it is important to be aware of the wider context in which your youth project/service exists. In many cases, how you have to act is dictated or influenced by the law

- Equal Status Act 2000
- Employment Equality Act 1998
- Equality Act 2004
- Disability Act 2005
- Citizens Information Act 2007
- Youth Work Act 2001
- National Youth Work Development Plan (NYWDP) 2003 – 2007
- National Action Plan Against Racism 2005
- Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1948
- Education Welfare Act 2001
- United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989
- Refugee Act 1996
- Prohibition of Incitement to Hatred Act 1989
- Task Force on Travelling Community Report 1995
- National Children's Strategy 2000-2010

## Where else to get information and resources

A good policy keeps up to date with current practice, trends and legislation. Your policy should be a living document which directs and underpins the work you do and how it is done. Policy development takes time and effort but the return is worth the investment. There are a range of information sources and resources available to help you. Here are a few to get you started.

The Equality Authority is a good source of information and is recommended as a starting point [www.equality.ie](http://www.equality.ie)

The National Youth Council of Ireland, the representative body for national voluntary youth organisations, acts on issues that impact on young people. [www.youth.ie](http://www.youth.ie)

A youth website with a section on 'taking action' with opportunities and campaigns young people can become involved in. [www.spunout.ie](http://www.spunout.ie)

The National Youth Development Education Programme (NYDEP) details information about development education in the youth work sector. [www.youthdeved.ie](http://www.youthdeved.ie)

Show Racism the Red Card is harnessing the profile of sport to educate against racism. They also support programmes that encourage integration and sport. [www.theredcard.ie](http://www.theredcard.ie)

BeLonG To is an organisation for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered (LGBT) young people, aged between 14 and 23 [www.belongto.org](http://www.belongto.org)

The Irish Traveller Movement is a national network of organisations and individuals working within the Traveller community in Ireland [www.itmtrav.com](http://www.itmtrav.com)

The National Disability Authority is the lead state agency on disability issues, providing independent expert advice to Government on policy and practice. [www.nda.ie](http://www.nda.ie)

Sport Against Racism Ireland (SARI) supports and promotes cultural integration and social inclusion through sport. [www.sari.ie](http://www.sari.ie)

MOVE, Men Overcoming Violence, works in the area of domestic violence, with a primary aim of supporting the safety and wellbeing of women and their children who are experiencing, or have experienced violence/abuse in an intimate relationship. [www.moveireland.ie](http://www.moveireland.ie)

The National Employment Rights Authority (NERA) was established under the Social Partnership Agreement "Towards 2016" to achieve a national culture of employment rights compliance. [www.employmentrights.ie](http://www.employmentrights.ie)

## A policy on Diversity and Equality might use the following structure

- 1. A COVER PAGE.** This should include: the name of your youth project/service; the title of the policy; when it comes into force; the person(s) responsible for signing it off; and a date for reviewing it.
- 2. A POLICY STATEMENT.** This should state clearly, but in broad terms, what you want the diversity and equality policy to cover. It is a statement of intent and vision, saying what your youth project/service believes. It can be quite short and need not go into all the practical details; these are covered by the sections below
- 3. REASONS FOR THE POLICY.** This section should give, in clear bullet points, your reasons for creating this policy. Ask yourself questions such as: “Why is such a policy helpful?” and “What concerns would arise if we did not have a policy?” There are some practical reasons for having a policy like this, while other reasons may reflect values that are important to the youth project/service. All these reasons should be listed: they will help all those who are required to comply with the policy to understand its importance and accept it.
- 4. THOSE WHO MUST COMPLY WITH THIS POLICY.** This section could again be bullet-pointed, listing all those who you expect to follow the policy. They might include, for example, the project leader, youth workers, volunteers, students. If the work is run on an interagency basis, the expectations of each agency should be identified and agreed before the work starts.
- 5. IMPLEMENTATION.** This will be the largest section of the document, setting out the practical details of how you intend to put the policy into practice. It states who is responsible for what, and how, in practical terms, you intend the policy to be carried out. It might name the tasks for which various people are responsible e.g. who is responsible for equality proofing all literature produced by the youth project/service. See the section on ‘Things to think about’ above for some more prompts.
- 6. LINKS TO OTHER POLICY AREAS.** This section should list the other policies of your youth project/service that link into your diversity and equality policy. Links to other policy areas, such as your child protection and welfare policy, should be identified in this section. All your policies must interconnect; otherwise the vision for your youth project/service may become confused and pull people in different directions.

<sup>1</sup> Adapted from Equality Authority Definitions

