

# **YOUTH SERVICES GRANT SCHEME REFORM:**

**FINDINGS OF CONSULTATION WITH  
CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE  
REGARDING THEIR EXPERIENCE  
OF UNIVERSAL YOUTH SERVICES**

**A Summary Report**

## **Abbreviations:**

**CYP: Children and Young People**

**DCEDIY: Department of Children, Equality,  
Disability, Integration and Youth**

**IT: Information Technology**

**LGBTI+: Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex**

**NPO: National Participation Office**

**NYO: National Youth Organisation**

**UYS: Universal Youth Services**

**YSGS: Youth Services Grant Scheme**

**YAG: Youth Advisory Group**

## **Glossary:**

**Mentimeter: A presentation software that allows  
real-time voting.**

**Padlet: An educational technology that allows  
users to share content to virtual bulletin boards.**

**World Café: A methodology for hosting large  
group dialogue.**

## Context for report:

The Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY) are currently reforming the Youth Services Grant Scheme (YSGS), in preparation for which, consultations were held with young people to gain their views on youth services and the issues they felt should be included within the reform process.

## Executive Summary:

In a process managed by the National Participation Office (NPO), a Youth Advisory Group (YAG) was recruited to provide support in designing the consultation process.

Following this design phase and with the continued support of the National Participation Office (NPO), three consultations with young people were held. In these consultations, twenty-five young people from across Ireland provided their views on youth services. These consultations took place in November 2021.

## How the findings and recommendations from this consultation will be used:

The insights provided by young people during this consultative process (including input from the YAG) was encapsulated into this report, which was completed by an independent report writer.

These insights and inputs had a direct impact on the shape and scope of a DCEDIY Policy Options Paper on the reform of the YSGS. From this paper it can be seen that a number of individual project 'deliverables' were identified as a direct consequence of the input provided by young people. This paper, setting out the reform project's ultimate objectives, deliverables and timeframes was approved by Minister O' Gorman in July, 2022.

## The consultations explored four broad questions:

- 1) What is working well in universal youth services?
- 2) Are there barriers to accessing the services?
- 3) What are the gaps in current provision?
- 4) Are there any changes you'd like to see?

## Grouped Key Themes:

Participants were invited to share what they considered to be their top three positives, and top three challenges/barriers about Universal Youth Services. Participants uploaded this information onto Padlet. When the young people had finished uploading their responses to the questions onto the Padlet screen, the facilitator commenced an exercise to group the responses. The young people discussed the initial groupings, adding some further detail to the responses. The facilitator then worked with the participants to label the emergent themes.

Following the categorisation and labelling exercise on Padlet, the facilitator listed all the themes raised by participants on to a Mentimeter Poll to identify the top three themes from each consultation group.

Table 1 illustrates the top themes identified by each consultation group. These are further consolidated into five key themes below.

*Table 1 Priority themes by group*

	Top Priority	Second Priority	Third Priority
Group 1	(Need for) Awareness	Personal Development	Technical Support
Group 2	Accessibility	Lack of Awareness	Social Development
Group 3	Barriers To Entry	Social Interaction	Youth Culture

# Thematic Findings

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## 1) Personal Development (Yellow):

Feedback on this theme was overwhelmingly positive, with young people valuing the opportunity to socialise and focus on personal growth.

This discussion contained specific mention of:

- (a) leadership and interpersonal skills
- (b) life skills and new passions
- (c) opportunity to give opinions
- (d) skill share and progression

Some quotes voicing the value young people place on youth services:

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**“Improves confidence in young people”**

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**“It gives young people an opportunity to learn new skills and make connections”**

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**“Finding people with similar interests leading to less feelings of isolation etc.”**

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**“Keeping up with current youth issues”**

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However, a few people commented about not really knowing other people at their youth services, indicating that more could be done on this aspect. Some young people made suggestions that facilitators should make efforts to mix people up and to have a buddy system where people are new or shy, and also to make use of tools like WhatsApp to encourage people to get involved.

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**“It can be difficult for young people that are shy to make friends and find enjoyment in the activities because they are by themselves”**

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## 2) Awareness of Services (Green):

The lack of awareness of available services to young people was a consistent theme across the consultations. Young people concluded from their personal experiences of Universal Youth Services that more outreach and advertising was needed to inform young people and communities of their existence. In particular the groups highlighted the need for services to appreciate the “youth appeal” of their communications. Additionally, groups felt that there was a need for a resource consolidating available services for young people.

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**“There is not an Instagram account to be seen”**

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**Not a lot of young people know about the groups. In my group everyone who has joined found out from another friend... others don't know about these opportunities**

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### **3) Accessibility and Availability (Purple):**

This theme was broadly positive, reflecting the inclusive atmosphere within youth services. Participants in each of the groups also referred to the youth services as being a 'safe space' for young people with 'a relaxed atmosphere' that enabled young people to feel comfortable.

The transition to online or hybrid service provision was noted as a big positive over the last number of years. However, there was an acknowledgement that online provision has its drawbacks, particularly when used for extended periods.

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**"This online approach allows us to stay connected with the community. In my first move to college, I lost the connection to my home club. But now it is lovely to be able to zoom back in"**

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**"They are very inclusive spaces everyone's welcome"**

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**"Online works well when everyone knows each other. But if you aren't involved in the group, it can be hard to join in."**

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“The biggest barrier is travel. As a small group we have had to think about this. We need to consider how best to address this e.g. rent a bus or ask parents.”

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## 4) Barriers to Entry and retention (Red):

A number of barriers were identified which related to joining or staying with youth services including:

- a) **Bullying and intimidation** – for some young people who are at the receiving end of bullying in school, mainstream youth services are not always welcoming places, if the same young people attend the youth service.
- b) **Travel long distances to attend** – those living in rural areas, with limited transport and limited services in their locality cited these as significant barriers to accessing youth services.
- c) **Capacity** – some venues which do not always have capacity for the level of interest expressed, which resulted in some young people not being able to avail of services
- d) **Costs** – can be expensive to those living with financial restrictions, or in households where more than one person is a member of the youth services
- e) **Time commitment** – other commitments such as education, some young people felt they were not able to fully commit to the youth services
- f) **Maximum age as a member** – when a young person reaches a stipulated age in some of the services, they are expected to leave
- g) **Public and peer perception of UYS** – Some young people identified possible stigma towards people using youth services from parents/friends where membership of a youth group might not be seen as ‘cool’ and this could impact on a young person who may lack of courage to join

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“One young person described bullying as a hidden barrier to participating in universal youth services.”

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“Not able to fit them in around school work, home life etc.”

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## 5) Technical Support (Blue):

Described as 'Technical Support', participants outlined some of the challenges facing services which included:

- a) Trained leaders – several young people explained how services in their areas were impacted due to the lack of youth leaders
- b) Volunteers – activities in their clubs were limited or cancelled due to the lack of volunteers
- c) Garda vetting – activities sometimes have to be cancelled if there is a shortfall in the number of available adults who are vetted
- d) Buildings and spaces – services are generally delivered in a public or shared building or space
- e) Funding – cost of running the youth services in local communities and the lack of funding needed to do so were cited as challenging resource issues
- f) Internal communication – communication and organisation between group leaders could be improved to make the sessions run more smoothly

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**“If I want to go to the youth club, currently we don’t have a youth leader to run it, so we haven’t had youth council this year, so I have to go to the Galway one.”**

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**Some services could be made more accessible for people who have disabilities, e.g. in wheel chairs**

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## Recommendations:

In the second part of the consultation, the facilitators used a World Café approach to explore each of the themes in further detail, and to identify two key recommendations from each Group that could help improve Universal Youth Services in Ireland. These six key recommendations are outlined in Table 2.

*Table 2 Priority recommendations by group*

Group	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3
Recommendation 1	Advertising	Directory of services	Involve Young People in Decision Making
Recommendation 2	Technical Support	Social Media	Training for Staff and Volunteers

There was some overlap in the priority recommendations made by each of the Groups, so these have been collated under the following three umbrella headings:

1. Increase awareness of UYS (through Social Media, Directory of Services and Advertising);
2. Provide Technical Support and Resources (includes Training for Staff and Volunteers);
3. Involve Young People in Decision Making.

Participants provided a wide range of recommendations which fell both inside and outside the scope of the reform project. A summary of relevant recommendations is given in Table 3.

**Table 3 Recommendations for both Project Team and Sector**

<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>Within scope for YSGS Reform Project</b>	<b>Feedback to NYOs</b>
<b>Increased awareness of organisations providing Universal Youth Services</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Directory/Website providing info on local services</li> <li>• Proactive Engagement (via participants ‘representing’ their orgs to other children and young people – in appropriate fora)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Effective use of Social Media</li> <li>• Youth Appeal (Modern platforms)</li> <li>• Fun messaging</li> <li>• Experience based Advertising</li> </ul>
<b>Provide Technical Support and Resources</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Directory/Website providing info on local services</li> <li>• Proactive Engagement (via participants ‘representing’ their orgs to other children and young people – in appropriate fora)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Specific Training for staff and volunteers (Bullying, Digital Skills, LGBTI+, mental health)</li> <li>• Simplified Garda Vetting</li> <li>• Improved internal communications</li> <li>• New content and delivery options</li> </ul>
<b>Involve Young People in Decision Making</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Youth involvement on boards/steering groups</li> <li>• Input on programmes</li> <li>• Involve young people in Social Media campaigns</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Youth involvement in advertising and campaigns</li> <li>• Regular surveys for CYP</li> </ul>

## Effect on Reform Project:

Based on the above recommendations, there are four major impacts on the thinking/ approach of the reform project.

- (1) To investigate the feasibility of including a youth service directory.
- (2) To consider tailoring the funding model and governance framework to support the recruitment and retention of quality volunteers and youth workers.
- (3) To consider tailoring funding model to support infrastructure (buildings, IT and equipment)
- (4) To reserve spaces on the project advisory group for young people, where their voice will be considered with the same weight as all other stakeholders.



