

Thinking seriously about the youth service

Headliners talks to youth service representatives in Northern Ireland about their views on the current provision for young people.

The youth service has come under the spotlight at a recent conference organised by the Youth Council For Northern Ireland.

Key workers within the sector gathered in Belfast Castle to discuss the future of youth work provision.

Participants spent the day taking part in discussions, question and answer sessions as well as listening to invited speakers.

Youth media organisation Headliners caught up with conference speakers and guests to find out what their thoughts were on the future of the youth service.

David Cracknell from the University of Chester made clear what he thought the priority should be.

He said: "The wellbeing of the young people must be the absolute priority.

In order to achieve that, I think that we should make sure that everyone is working together rather than separately.

"This would, in my opinion, make a big difference."

Clare Mangan from the SELB said there was a lot of uncertainty about employment prospects for many young people and this must be addressed.

She added: "I think to listen to young people and to acknowledge what their needs are is the big priority.

"I think, especially in today's climate, the fears of young people are, "Will I be able to get a job?" "Are my qualifications good enough?" "If I haven't got good qualifications, what can I do?"

"So I think it is vital we listen first, to identify the needs, and then to look at all the policies, not just youth policy as an individual focus, but what can be done in terms of health, what can be done in terms of social security, social planning.

"Young people should have a sense of belonging; a sense of optimism and a bit of security for their future."

Conference chairperson Breda Friel spoke about how communication between agencies was key to helping the youth service develop.

Ms Friel from the University Of Ulster said the way inter-agency work develops over the next few years would shape the service

She explained: "What I thought when I came here has kind of evolved into something else. One of the key aims was about shaping and influencing the future structure of the youth service and how it will relate. It's about a much finer process.

"I think one of the speakers, David [Cracknell], talked about the boundary at which the inter-agency conversations can take place.

"And I think it's at that boundary and in the language we use to understand each other. So for me, what I'd like to see coming out of today is a clearer understanding of the way in which organisations and the youth service can work and participate and collaborate in a complimentary way – together."

While many of those who attended the conference agreed changes needed to take place if youth work is to become more effective, Jim Lewis from the NEELB said the positive work that is happening already must be acknowledged.

He added: "The state of the youth service is very healthy, in many, many instances.

"There are many, many, many good youth workers doing good youth work.

People who care, people who care about the young people, people who build relationships with the young people, people who become significant to the young people and people who understand what it is they are trying to do."

However, Sara McCartan said more resources need to be given over to the sector if the positive work with young people is to continue.

The Northern Ireland Youth Forum's chairperson warned many of the services are under threat due to a lack of money and under investment.

She added: "For the youth service at the minute, there is not a lot of money coming into the youth service, and a lot of different programmes and organisations are suffering because of that.

"I suppose, in my opinion it's up to the government and the Department of Education to change that by better resourcing youth service."

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About This Article

This article and radio programme was written and produced by Julia Brennecke, 19, from Headliners in Belfast.

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