

Generalist Youth Information Services in Ireland in 1997

The attached pages constitute the chapter concerning **Ireland** which is part of a 17-country study completed in 1997. Each chapter provides a summary of the situation in the country at the end of 1997 concerning generalist youth information and counselling, and the methods and structures involved in its organisation and distribution.

This study was conducted by the **European Youth Information and Counselling Agency** (ERYICA), to which all the author organisations belong as “Member Organisations” or as “Co-operating Organisations”. Accordingly, the study is limited to those countries where in 1996-97 there existed functioning networks of generalist youth information centres and services which were co-operating with ERYICA.

The 17 chapters of this study, in separate English and French versions, can be consulted on the ERYICA Internet site (“www.eryica.org” - see the section “Documents”, then “1997 Study”). Each file, which is in Word 2.0 for Windows / PC (varying between 4 and 20 pages in length), can also be downloaded from the site.

More recent information about each ERYICA national partner, its activities and its network can also be found on the ERYICA Internet site:

- a) **current addresses of national partners**: under “Discover ERYICA”, then “Members”, then “Country”
- b) **links to Internet sites of national partners**: under “Discover SERVICES”, then “Web-sites of ERYICA Partners”
- c) (when the organisation co-ordinates a network) **links to a list of addresses of regional or local centres**: under “Discover ERYICA”, then “Members”, then “Country”.

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IRL

IRELAND

INTRODUCTION

The first generalist Youth Information Centres (YICs) were set up in Ireland in 1982 with the following aims:

- to act, in a central location and in an informal supportive environment, as an information co-ordinating unit for the many sources of information available to young people and to refer them to specialist services, as required;
- to enable young people, through the presentation of information regarding options open to them, to make informed decisions, and to develop their skills, abilities and interests, thereby promoting their autonomy and facilitating their transition to adult and working life and their participation in society;
- to alert young people to the existence of services, facilities and opportunities available to them, and to encourage them to use information sources and develop information skills as a basis for personal advancement.

Support and recognition for youth information and advice services came from the National Youth Policy Committee in 1984 which recommended their development as part of the mainline youth work services. In 1985, the White Paper on Youth Policy "*In Partnership with Youth*" recommended that: "*priority should be given to information, advice and counselling within the*

local planning of youth provision as part of the comprehensive youth service".

While there were many initiatives in youth information provision from 1982, a key development was the decision, in 1988, of the Minister of State for Youth Affairs to introduce a special funding allocation, from National Lottery proceeds, as well as a co-ordinating structure for the development of a youth information network. A report which he commissioned from the National Youth Council of Ireland at the time: "*Youth Information: The Irish Response*" provided recommendations for this development.

The information for this text has been provided by the National Youth Information Monitoring Committee (NYIMC), which advises the Irish Department of Education on the development of the network of 25 centres:

NYIMC
Youth Information Resource Unit
Hawkins House (11th Floor)
Hawkins Street, IRL - Dublin 2
☎ (353+1) 889.20.14
Fax: (353+1) 671.52.70

Text updated: December 1997

At present, the national youth information network comprises 25 Centres, which are mainly funded by the Youth Affairs Section of the Department of Education and administered by a variety of youth organisations (in some cases in conjunction with local Vocational Education Committees). Dublin Corporation Public Libraries also operate a Community and Youth Information Centre in Dublin's city centre.

PHILOSOPHY OF CENTRES

Youth Information Centres, which operate as an integrated part of locally based youth services, provide a free, generalist, drop-in information service, in specially designed premises, to young people and those who work with them. By providing fast and easy access to information in a warm, supportive environment, they aim to promote the autonomy of young people by enabling them to make informed decisions about their lives.

The Centres operate in accordance with the *Code of Standards for Youth Information Centres* (see box on p.4), which has been specially developed for the network and which is used as the basis for the registration of the centres.

GOVERNMENT POLICY ON YOUTH INFORMATION

The policy of the Youth Affairs Section of the Department of Education is to support the development of a network of Youth Information Centres as an integrated part of local youth services. Department funding is, therefore, provided for the network of 25 Centres as well as for the provision of a co-ordinating structure and support services.

Government policy, in the youth information area, has recently been set out in the 1995 White Paper on Education "*Charting our Education Future*", where

it is stated that "*the network of youth information centres will be further developed, particularly in disadvantaged areas. Particular emphasis will be placed on the integration of these centres into local youth services, on their outreach work and their involvement of volunteers from local communities.*"

Profile of Irish Network

National Co-ordination:

- National Youth Information Co-ordinator
- NYIMC - National Youth Information Monitoring Committee

Network:

- Youth Information Resource Unit (national support unit)
- 25 local Centres

Legal Status:

NYIMC is a body appointed by the Department of Education to advise it.

Local centres are non-profit associations.

Number of Information Workers Employed in Network:

35 salaried employees (approx.)

Responsible Governmental Body:

Youth Affairs Section of the Department of Education

LEGAL STATUS AND FINANCING OF CENTRES

Youth Information Centres operate as an integrated part of local youth services which are autonomous non-governmental agencies.

Staffing

Each of the youth organisations involved employs at least one full-time, professional member of staff (in some cases two) to co-ordinate the youth information service. Many Centres also use temporary employment schemes or volunteers as the source of extra staffing. The majority of Centre Co-ordinators have a third level qualification in a discipline such as communications, librarianship or social work.

Finance

The Centres are mainly funded by the Youth Affairs Section of the Department of Education from National Lottery proceeds. In some cases, this funding is supplement-ed, at local level, by monies raised from other sources.

NATIONAL CO-ORDINATION OF CENTRES

National Youth Information Monitoring Committee

The National Youth Information Monitoring Committee (NYIMC) advises the Department of Education on the development of the youth information network and has also recently been designated by the Department as the registration body for Youth Information Centres. The NYIMC is composed of representatives of the organisations involved in the delivery of youth information services, local Vocational Education Committees (VECs) and the National Youth Council of Ireland.

The Terms of Reference of the NYIMC are as follows:

- 1) *To advise the Department of Education on:*
 - *appropriate services, standards, and support mechanisms*
 - *funding requirements*

- *evaluation criteria*

for Youth Information services in receipt of Department of Education financial aid.

- 2) *To propose to the Department, following such consultation as the Committee deems appropriate, development of, and improvements to, the network of Youth Information services, and to be consulted by the Department prior to any extension of the network and in relation to proposals for the areas listed at (1)*
- 3) *To monitor the work of the National Youth Information Co-ordinator*
- 4) *To act as the registration body for Youth Information Centres*

National Youth Information Co-ordinator

The Department of Education also employs a National Youth Information Co-ordinator to co-ordinate and support the work of local YICs and to service the work of the NYIMC.

Youth Information Resource Unit

Support services to local Youth Information Centres are provided from the Youth Information Resource Unit which is located in the Department of Education and managed by the National Youth Information Co-ordinator. These include training, consultancy, a clearing-house for information materials, a forum for practitioners, publicity/promotion, computer support and representation.

These services are available to Youth Information Centres which are funded by the Department of Education and comply with the NYIMC *Code of Standards for Youth Information Centres*.

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN GOVERNMENT AND YOUTH INFORMATION STRUCTURES

Code of Standards

1. Principles

1.1 The service will be centred on the needs of young people and adopt a personalised approach.

1.2 The service will be impartial and non-judgmental, and the information given objective and free from bias.

1.3 The service will be open to all young people, without discrimination, and will seek to guarantee equality of access for all.

1.4 The information provided will be free of charge.

1.5 Confidentiality and respect for the anonymity of the user will be guaranteed (within the confines of the law).

1.6 The style of work will promote a warm, friendly, informal atmosphere.

1.7 The service will be non-directive and will promote the autonomy and empowerment of young people by enabling them to arrive at their own decisions, and take their own actions.

1.8 The service will be independent and free of any political or commercial interest.

1.9 The service will be integrated with, or work in close co-operation with, local youth services.

The Code of Standards also has sections on Management, Finance, Premises, Personnel, Information Service / System, Opening Hours, Publicity, Outreach, Educational Role, Liaison, Monitoring / Evaluation.

Source: "Standards for Youth Information Centres", NYIMC, 1996.

As stated earlier, the Youth Affairs Section of the Department of Education, in addition to funding the network of Youth Information Centres, also employs a National Youth Information Co-ordinator and funds the provision of support services for local YICs, through the Youth Information Resource Unit. It has appointed the National Youth Information Monitoring Committee to advise it on appropriate services, standards, support mechanisms, funding requirements, new services and evaluation criteria.

While broad policy matters such as funding, development and location of new services are the concern of the Department, the Centres themselves are administered by a variety of youth organisations which are autonomous in their operation. In the context of the grant administration system, YICs submit an Annual Report to the Department which, in addition to providing an account of activities in the preceding year, under headings set down by the Department, also allows the Centres to highlight new trends and emerging needs.

The Department has adopted the NYIMC *Code of Standards for Youth Information Centres* which is used as the basis for the registration and recognition of YICs.

As well as facilitating co-operation, joint activity, and a pooling of resources and expertise, the co-ordinating structure, in the framework of the NYIMC and the Youth Information Resource Unit, also provides a forum for raising and advancing the interests of the network at Governmental level.

TYPICAL SERVICES PROVIDED

All Youth Information Centres provide a free, generalist, drop-in and telephone information and advice service, in specially designed premises, to young people and those who work with them. Subjects covered include:

- Employment Matters
- Coping with Unemployment
- Careers
- Education and Training
- Rights and Entitlements
- Sport and Leisure
- Youth Work
- Accommodation
- Money Matters
- Local Services and Facilities
- Organisations and Clubs
- Entertainment and Recreation
- Travel at home and abroad
- Health
- Voluntary Work
- Migration
- Consumer Affairs
- Legal Matters
- Family or Personal Problems

Many Centres provide ancillary services such as help in preparing a curriculum vitae, European Youth Cards, hostelling cards. All services are provided free of charge, except in the case of ancillary services or take-away copies of certain information booklets.

Each Centre has an information bank of materials covering issues of interest to young people. The information bank is composed both of materials collected by Centre staff and those supplied by the Youth Information Resource Unit. These materials are classified according to the NYIMC *Classification System for Youth Information Centres*.

Generally, the Centres are open during office hours with some late-night and Saturday opening.

OUTREACH ACTIVITIES

In an attempt to make their services accessible to all young people, a range of outreach activities is also provided bringing information to young people through information points, workshops, exhibitions, publications, activities in schools and youth clubs and through the local media. Particular emphasis is placed on work with disadvantaged young people.

ASSESSING THE INFORMATION NEEDS OF YOUNG PEOPLE

As Youth Information Centres are an integrated part of local youth services, youth information workers can draw on the experience of full time youth workers and a range of other agency contacts, with local knowledge, when assessing the information needs of young people. The outreach work undertaken (e.g. in schools and youth clubs) also provides opportunities for consultations with young people about their information needs.

The network of Youth Information Centres has also developed a uniform, computer-based system for recording queries which can be analysed at local and national level to highlight areas of greatest need as well as emerging needs and trends.

CO-OPERATION WITH OTHER SERVICES

Youth Information Centre staff work in close co-operation with a wide range of other relevant voluntary and statutory agencies and refer young people to them when further information or specialist help is required.

This co-operation can also take the form of joint activities (e.g. seminars), joint publications, committee work or funding for special projects.

Specialised Information Services for Young People

*In addition to the **generalist** youth information services described here, young people in Ireland have access to **specialised** information services in a number of fields. These include:*

a) Careers Information and Guidance

Counsellors providing careers guidance are available in all secondary schools

b) Emigration

Emigrant Advice

1A Cathedral Street, Dublin 1

☎ (353+1) 873.28.44

c) Employment

FAS (Employment & Training Authority)

27-33 Upper Baggot Street, Dublin 4

☎ (353+1) 668.57.77

d) Health

National Youth Health Programme

c/o National Youth Council of Ireland

3 Montague Street, Dublin 2

☎ (353+1) 478.41.22

e) Mobility and Youth Exchanges

Léargas - The Exchange Bureau

Avoca House

189/193 Parnell Street, Dublin 1

☎ (353+1) 873.14.11

HOW PLURALISM AND QUALITY ARE GUARANTEED

The Centres operate in accordance with the NYIMC *Code of Standards for Youth Information Centres*. Good practice is also promoted through training and other support services provided by the Youth Information Resource Unit.

Training

An important task of the Youth Information Resource Unit is the provision of training courses, both subject and skills based, for Centre staff. YIC staff also avail of relevant training courses offered by other agencies at local and national level. In 1991 and 1992, a certificate course in Youth Information Studies was organised by the NYIMC, in association with a university, St. Patrick's College in May-nooth.

New Technology

In 1991 and 1997, funding was allocated by the Youth Affairs Section of the Department of Education for the purchase of new computer equipment and software for the network of Youth Information Centres, as well as for the training of youth information personnel in its use.

The equipment is used to carry out a wide variety of information-related tasks which greatly enhance the work of local Centres. All the Centres are equipped to access Internet services.

EUROPEAN DIMENSION

The NYIMC is the Irish member of the European Youth Information and Counselling Agency (ERYICA) and is a signatory of the European Youth Information Charter.

Youth Information Centre staff and NYIMC members have participated in, and benefited from, different activities assisted by the European Commission and by the Council of Europe, including:

- an International Summer University organised by ERYICA in Mollina (Spain) in 1995

- youth information seminars organised in Paris (1994) and Leeds (1995) by PIAFE, a partnership of Youth Information networks in Wales, Ireland (Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland), England, France and Scotland
- the development of a training module for youth information workers, in conjunction with United Kingdom and Italian partners
- a certificate course in Youth Information Studies in Maynooth in 1991 and 1992
- a European Awareness Week for young people, "Europe is for Youth", organised by the NYIMC and PETRA-Ireland in 1994
- • European Drug Prevention Weeks in 1992 and 1994
- European Training Course (Strasbourg, December 1996) organised jointly by ERYICA and the Council of Europe.

Close contacts have also been developed between Youth Information Centres in Ireland and France through study visits organised in the framework of the Ireland - France Exchange Programme.