Cooperation with European countries

As a devolved administration of the United Kingdom, Northern Ireland does not have separate representation in European and international inter-governmental organisations. However, the Northern Ireland Executive feeds views to UK Government Departments to contribute to a UK position.

UK participation in the European Union funded programmes, Erasmus+ [1], the EU funding programme for education, training, youth and sport 2014-2020, is not covered here (see the article on ‘Cross-border learning mobility’ [2]).

The UK participates in the EU Council’s Youth Working Party [3], which sits under the Education, Youth, Culture and Sport (EYCS) Council [4]. The Working Party on Youth prepares items for decision by EU ministers for youth at each EYCS Council meeting. There is an EYCS Council meeting during each six-monthly EU presidency. Via representatives in Brussels, the UK contributes to draft youth conclusions via the Working Party for Youth. These conclusions are then put to the Council for approval.

The Working Group for Youth and the EYCS Council operate under the EU’s Open Method of Cooperation (OMC). Under the OMC, EU countries are evaluated by one another against a set of indexes, with the Commission’s role being limited to surveillance (i.e. it has no legislative or formal powers of compulsion).

North South Ministerial Council

The North South Ministerial Council (NSMC [5]) was established under the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement [6], to develop consultation, cooperation and action within the island of Ireland - including through implementation on an all-island and cross-border basis - on matters of mutual interest. Education is one of the sectors, or areas, of cooperation, and the agreed work programme includes objectives for ‘school, youth and teaching exchanges’:

- a more integrated and coherent approach to exchanges, including the clarification of policy objectives, targets and common criteria for the assessment of exchanges
• the scope for the further development of exchanges in areas or sectors which have not previously participated
• issues of concern in both jurisdictions such as child protection arrangements, measures focused on disadvantaged children and young people, evaluation and research, conflict resolution and cross-community activity

British-Irish Council

The British-Irish Council (BIC) is a forum whereby ministers of the British and Irish Governments, the devolved administrations of Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, and the Crown Dependencies of the Isle of Man, Jersey and Guernsey cooperate on matters of mutual interest. Education, formal and non-formal, is one of the priority areas for cooperation.

The current work programme includes 'creative industries', with the impact of the creative industries on youth employment running through the specific themes.

International Fund for Ireland

The International Fund for Ireland was established as an independent international organisation by the British and Irish Governments in 1986. It is funded by contributions from the United States of America, the European Union, Canada, Australia and New Zealand.

The Fund’s role is to engage communities and individuals, particularly young people, who have only recently or have not yet participated in peace building and community reconciliation activities. The Fund has recently launched Community Consolidation: Peace Consolidation. A Strategy for the International Fund for Ireland 2016-2020, which aims to help tackle some of the most significant remaining challenges to lasting peace.

One of the four key activity areas is the Personal Youth Development Programme (PYDP), which focuses on the needs of young people who are at risk of radicalisation and recruitment to organisations determined to undermine the Peace Process between Nationalists and Unionists.

International cooperation

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The UK Government, as a signatory of the European Cultural Convention (CETS No. 18), participates in the European Steering Committee for Youth (CDEJ). The CDEJ supervises a programme of activities involving policy makers, youth researchers and youth work practitioners and focuses particularly on the development of youth policies in its member states which are likely to ensure young people’s successful integration into society.

The European Youth Foundation (EYF) is a fund established in 1972 by the Council of Europe to provide financial and educational support for European youth activities. Youth non-governmental organisations (NGOs) may apply to it for funding.