

Welcome to the January 2009 edition of the Early Years Information Briefing for the early childhood sector. This is one in a series of briefing papers which will be issued for Early Years staff, members and key stakeholders including MLAs, Ministers and Civil Servants.

A Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland

Big Lottery Fund – Big Thinking Consultation

The Big Lottery Fund is the largest of the lottery distributors, responsible for awarding half the money that the National Lottery raises for good causes. They have distributed over £2.7billion to thousands of projects covering health, education, the environment and charitable causes. In Northern Ireland 3450 awards have been made (£119,679,849).

The Big Lottery Fund is now considering how they can make the best contribution over the next five years, and how they can do even better in ensuring money goes to the best projects that will have the most significant outcomes. While they recognise that a significant amount of money will be diverted to the Olympics over the next few years, they still have millions to distribute to other projects, and they are seeking ideas on how that money can be best spent.

Big Thinking is how they describe their consultation document, where they are asking for ideas on how to spend their money. They are asking ten general questions to help them shape what they do in the future.

1. They have identified “transitions” and “isolation” as starting points or themes for their funding, but are interested in hearing your opinion on whether you think these are the correct themes?
2. They believe that the majority of their funding should go to the most marginalised groups, is this the right approach?
3. How can they build lasting partnerships and engage the private sector?
4. The majority of their funding goes to the community and voluntary sector, should this continue to be the case and should they guarantee that a percentage of their funding goes to this sector?
5. They believe that applicants welcome more support during the application process and if they are successful in receiving funding, and welcome information on why applications were not successful. Do you support this, even though it might mean they can award less money, what would make them a better funder in the way they work?
6. Big Lottery tries to balance between accessibility and lasting impact, should they aim to fund fewer projects, but fund them for a longer time?
7. Although they look for evidence that what they are going to fund will work, they also want to fund new ideas and approaches. Do you think they should take more risks with their funding, to help promote innovation?
8. Most of their money is distributed at local levels, should more of their money be managed or distributed at a UK-wide level?
9. 70% of the population play the lottery, and therefore have an interest in how the money is distributed. Which ways of increasing public involvement do you think would work best?
10. Big Lottery distributes other funds (for example on behalf of government departments) are there any other sources of funding they could manage?

They are also asking some questions specific to Northern Ireland.

1. What are the emerging issues and areas of need in Northern Ireland? Where are the gaps in funding?

2. With the ending of Peace Money, they assume demand for their funding will increase. How can they manage these increased demands?
3. Should they focus more resources on development and support activities for those making grant applications?
4. What role should they play in supporting the development of skills for the community and voluntary sector?
5. How best can they support community planning in Northern Ireland?

More information is available at their website, www.big-thinking.org.uk including a facility to answer the questions online. Early Years strongly urges our members, and other stakeholders, to respond to this consultation. The consultation closes on 27 February 2009.

Charities Act (NI) 2008

In September 2008, further to receipt of Royal Assent the Charities Bill became the Charities Act (NI) 2008. The Charity Commission for Northern Ireland is due to be established in March 2009. There are now 12 defined charitable purposes;

1. The prevention or relief of poverty.
2. The advancement of education.
3. The advancement of religion.
4. The advancement of health or the saving of lives.
5. The advancement of citizenship or community development.
6. The advancement of the arts, culture, heritage or science.
7. The advancement of amateur sport.
8. The advancement of human rights, conflict resolution or reconciliation or the promotion of religious or racial harmony or equality and diversity.
9. The advancement of environmental protection or improvement.
10. The relief of those in need by reason of youth, age, ill health, disability, financial hardship or other disadvantage.
11. The advancement of animal welfare.
12. Any other purposes includes any purpose recognised as charitable under existing charity law and any purposes which may reasonably be regarded as analogous to the listed purposes above as well as those by virtue of section one of the Recreational Charities Act (1958).

This new wider definition helps recognise work here in the areas of peace and reconciliation, or addressing sectarianism and racism. It will also make it easier to support networks and infrastructure bodies.

In order to **register as a charity** you must have one or more of the charitable purposes listed and must provide public benefit in Northern Ireland or elsewhere. A Register of Charities will be maintained by the Charities Commission. It is hoped that by having a register, transparency and public confidence will be promoted, for example it will be possible to check that anyone doing a door-to-door collection is legitimate. Establishment of the Register is expected in September 2009, with registrations anticipated in April 2010. It is anticipated that larger charities will register first.

Under the new legislation, all charities will be required to keep proper **accounting records**. Unincorporated charities with an income of under £100,000 must get an independent examination of their finances carried out by an examiner who is judged to have experience to carry out an audit of the accounts. Alternatively they can choose to have an audit done. It is anticipated that the first financial returns and reports will be required in 2011.

A new type of legal entity is also to be introduced; the **Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO)** will be similar to a Limited Company in offering protection of trustees from personal liability. CIOs will not have to report or register with company and charity law, as they will be regulated by the new Commission. This is a very positive development for charities, and it is expected it will be introduced by 2010.

The present system for **street and house-to-house collections** is to be replaced with new legislation. The Act defines two types of collection; collections in a public place and house-to-house collections. An organisation must have a public collections certificate and a permit to carry out a collection in a public place and a house-to-house collection. Both will be issued by the Commission, but later this will be the responsibility of the local council. The new legislation provides for local short-term collections which will be considered exempt from the requirement to obtain a public collections certificate and a permit to collect. A collection is local, short-term collection if the appeal is local in character and does not exceed the prescribed period. These new rule are expected to become operational in 2011.

The Department has set up an interim website for the new Charity Commission at www.dsdni.gov.uk/ccni which provides more information on the Charities Act, the role of the new Commission and the timescales for implementation. In the meantime if you require further information please contact Margaret Alton or Shirley Hawkes at Early Years.

A Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland – UPDATE

- The Good Friday / Belfast Agreement asked the NI Human Rights Commission (NIHRC) to consult and advise on the scope for a Bill of Rights that would reflect the “particular circumstances of Northern Ireland” and how any rights would be additional to those already outlined in the European and UN rights already outlined.
- Consultation has been ongoing since 2001 via a Bill of Rights Forum and the Human Rights Consortium (a loose grouping of 130 community and voluntary organisations).
- The Bill of Rights Forum set up a Children and Young People’s working group that looked specifically at what rights for children there should be. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child was set as the minimum starting point.
- The NIHRC has now submitted its report to the Government (December 2008).
- It is now expected that there will be a public consultation, but it is unclear if that will be on the NIHRC submission or a revised report from the Northern Ireland Office (NIO), the consultation is anticipated for the end of February and will be open for 8-12 weeks.
- It is anticipated that legislation will come into force in 2010.

World Forum and Early Years AGM - Thursday 18th June 2009

Early Years Annual General Meeting will take place as part of the World Forum on **June 18** from **6pm to 8pm** at the **Europa Hotel, Belfast**. We hope that all our members will join us in providing a welcome to the World Forum delegates to Northern Ireland.

The AGM is a **free event** and provides the best opportunity for members to shape the direction of Early Years and influence our work. Before the AGM papers are sent to all members to encourage them to put forward resolutions or new ideas for the work we undertake. Your local Branch Representative will be collating ideas and helping the Branches put forward resolutions and nominations for the AGM.

The AGM will be followed by a wine reception, fork buffet and entertainment. Early Years will be sending out formal notification of the AGM in the next few weeks, and we encourage all our members to attend.