

FROM THE OFFICE OF THE MINISTER



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Dear Youth Service Management Committee

On 19 March, I advised all voluntary youth providers to cease generic/non-targeted provision but asked that youth organisations work closely with the Education Authority (EA) to ensure the needs of vulnerable young people continue to be addressed.

I would like to personally thank you and your staff for the way you have responded and the excellent work you have done to support young people during the current pandemic, in particular ensuring that those most vulnerable have continued to receive vital support.

Young people have also risen to the challenges presented by lockdown, including, in many cases, through volunteering within their communities. However, survey evidence suggests they are missing the opportunity for social interaction through schools and youth groups. As we begin to consider restarting education services more generally, I feel there would be real value in facilitating from some form of structured activity for young people over the summer months which would provide them with the opportunity to meet with others in a safe environment.

With the needs of the most vulnerable young people to the fore, I have asked the statutory Youth Sector to continue with their role in supporting vulnerable children and young people, including some further small group work with young people at risk to themselves and/or others within their community; targeted outreach and detached work informed and supported by the PSNI, with a focus on de-escalation of tensions. EA is coordinating this work and has developed clear protocols for delivery.

If you wish to highlight a need for any work with vulnerable children and young people, including outreach or detached work, you should contact your Senior Youth Worker in your area in the first instance.

Therefore the voluntary youth sector should focus their summer activity plans on those young people who they consider would most benefit from the provision on offer. I would particularly like you to take account of children of key workers who would otherwise be restricted in providing vital services in the fight against the infection and those in other sectors involved in restarting our economy.

I am pleased that, together with my Executive colleagues, agreement has been reached for continuance of the Eat Well, Live Well programme over July and August. I am waiting for confirmation of additional funding from the Finance Minister to allow this to proceed. Delivered as part of the Department for Communities response, this has provided food to young people most at risk from a lack of food. I congratulate those involved in responding quickly to this need.

I recognise the important role the Voluntary and Uniformed Youth Sectors play in supporting our young people and welcome your continued assistance in providing such support in new and innovative ways during this very challenging time.

I have agreed with Executive colleagues a programme of targeted activity during July and August, to support a range of children and young people. This includes permission for youth work settings who wish to do so to provide some limited activities, with a focus on 9-13 year olds and priority those known to youth workers who would most benefit from engaging in youth-led activities.

What is envisaged is not a return to normal summer of programme delivery, but rather some form of youth-led activity to engage young people who have been most challenged by the restrictions, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

As previously stated, it would be helpful if account is taken of children of key workers who would otherwise be restricted in providing vital services in the fight against the infection including those in transport and retail and others who will be vital in restarting our economy.

I would stress that any delivery over July and August is entirely voluntary – it will be for management committees, in conjunction with their staff and volunteers to determine what, if anything they can deliver, with safety for staff and young people an overriding requirement. **You must only deliver summer activities if you are confident you can do so safely.**

To avoid any risk of spreading the infection, any plans must adhere to the restrictions that are in place at the time of delivery (recognising that these may change over the July and August). Full details of the conditions that **should** be applied are set out in the attached **Annex A**.

My Department published guidance for all educational settings on safe working during the current pandemic (www.education-ni.gov.uk/news/guidance-support-safe-working-educational-settings-published) which outlines practical considerations that need to be in place. Further details and links to additional guidance can be found in **Annex B**.

It is important to recognise that this is not a full reopening of generic youth services. You should note that Primary 7, Year 12 and Year 14 pupils along with vulnerable children in all year groups will return to school on 24 August 2020 and you should take account of this in plans for any summer activity.

Should your organisation be able to assist in the delivery of summer activity programmes, I would ask that you contact your local Senior Youth Worker at least one week in advance of any delivery to confirm and advise regarding the activity to be delivered.

Youth organisations will have access to EA funding based on historical core funding for summer work. Any additional costs to comply with DE Safe working Guidance should be factored in. Given this is not a full reopening of generic youth service activities youth settings not previously in receipt of this funding will need to deliver within their own resources and this should be factored into any management committee decision.

Finally, the EA is leading on plans for a wider youth restart. As part of this work, further supplementary guidance and support, including training will be provided for youth work settings to facilitate a restart of generic youth provision. It is anticipated this will be available from early July.

If further clarification is required, you should contact the Youth Work Policy Team in the first instance (email: Youth.Services@education-ni.gov.uk).

May I take this opportunity to thank you for your ongoing co-operation and assistance.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Peter Weir'.

Peter Weir MLA
Minister of Education