

# Youth Link NI

## Company Limited by Guarantee

### Trustees' Annual Report (Incorporating the Chief Executive Officer's Report)

Year ended 31 March 2024

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The trustees, who are also the directors for the purposes of company law, present their report and the financial statements of the charity for the year ended 31 March 2024.

#### Reference and administrative details

Registered charity name	Youth Link NI
Charity registration number	NIC103369
Company registration number	NI071572
Principal office and registered Office	Farset Enterprise Park 638 Springfield Road Belfast BT12 7DY Northern Ireland

#### The trustees

RJ McCullagh	
D McWall (Treasurer)	
P Brown	
D Kelly	
F McNally	
I Taylor	
G Thompson	
G Gilmore (Vice Chairperson)	
S Henry (Chairperson)	
J McLoughlin	
W Fyffe	(Resigned 31 December 2023)
C Hinchliff	
E Rea	
P Patterson	(Assigned 20 June 2023)

#### Key Management Personnel

Chief Executive Officer	Joseph McKeown	
Finance Manager	Jenny Bell	
Academic Studies Manager	Sharon Raine	(Resigned 31 May 2023)
Executive Officer	Maria McKenna	

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**Company secretary** M McKenna

**Auditor** Finegan Gibson Ltd  
Chartered accountants & statutory auditor  
Causeway Tower  
9 James Street South  
Belfast  
BT2 8DN

**Bankers**  
First Trust  
35 University Road  
Belfast  
BT7 1ND

**Solicitors**  
Cleverer Fulton Rankin  
50 Bedford Street  
Belfast  
BT2 7FW

Edwards and Co Solicitors  
28 Hill Street  
Belfast  
BT1 2LA

## **Youth Link NI**

### **Company Limited by Guarantee**

### **Trustees' Annual Report (Incorporating the Chief Executive Officer's Report)** *(continued)*

**Year ended 31 March 2024**

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#### **Structure, governance, and management**

##### **Governing Document**

Youth Link: NI is a company limited by guarantee governed by its Memorandum and Articles of Association dated July 2015. Youth Link: NI is a registered charity with the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland.

##### **Appointment of Trustees**

Members of the Executive Council and Youth Link Honorary Officers are appointed by the relevant decision-making bodies of its member Churches and / or the Denominational Representatives. Council members are appointed for a period of three years. A retiring Trustee is eligible for re-appointment.

Appointments to the Trustees by members of their respective relevant Decision-Making Bodies shall be made as follows:

- Up to six Trustees to be appointed by the Roman Catholic Church.
- Up to three Trustees to be appointed by The Presbyterian Church.
- Up to three Trustees to be appointed by The Methodist Church.
- Up to three Trustees to be appointed by Church of Ireland (Together known as the Denominational Representatives).
- Two Trustees to be appointed by the Denominational Representatives.

Members will be informed of the retirement of those Trustees who wish to retire or who are retiring by rotation and will elect Trustees to fill vacancies arising at the General Meeting.

##### **Trustee induction and training**

Induction and training sessions for Trustees are organised as required. As part of the induction process new Trustees are made aware of a Trustees' legal obligations under charity and company law, the content of the Memorandum and Articles of Association, the committee and decision-making processes, the operational and strategic plan and recent financial performance of the charity.

##### **Arrangements for setting pay and remuneration of key management personnel**

The directors comprise the Board of Directors, who are the charity's Trustees, and the management team comprise the key management personnel of the charity in charge of directing and controlling, running, and operating the charity on a day-to-day basis. All directors give of their time freely and no director received remuneration during the year. Details of directors' expenses and related party transactions are disclosed in Note 14 to the accounts.

The pay of the management team is reviewed annually and normally increased in accordance with inflation. During 2015/16 the Trustees reviewed management team salaries and benchmarked against pay levels in other similar size charities run on a voluntary basis and scale points were set accordingly. Progression is dependent upon the outcome of individual annual appraisals.

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### Trustees' Annual Report (Incorporating the Chief Executive Officer's Report)

*(continued)*

Year ended 31 March 2024

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#### Organisation structure and how charity makes decisions

The Executive Council, which can have up to 17 members, administers the charity. The Council meets four times per annum, normally September, December, March, and June. A Sub-Committee of the Executive Council, Finance & Personnel Sub-Committee normally meets a month prior to Executive Council meetings and reviews all matters relating to the management of finance, funding, staffing, and assets. A Director is appointed by the Trustees to manage the day-to-day operations of the charity. To facilitate effective operations, the Director has delegated authority, within terms of delegation approved by the Trustees, for operational matters including finance, employment, and direct charitable activities.

#### Relationships with related parties

The Trustees do not receive any remuneration unless it is authorised by Article 7 of the Articles of Association.

Executive Council members and staff members are asked to declare their interests in, and any gifts or hospitality received in connection with their role in Youth Link NI.

A declaration of interests form is completed by all Council members and staff for this purpose, listing the types of interest that should be declared. Interests are recorded on Youth Link's Register of Interests which is maintained by the Company Secretary.

#### Risk management

The Trustees have a Risk Management Strategy which comprises:

- An annual review of the principal risks and uncertainties that the charity faces.
- The establishment of policies, systems, and procedures to mitigate those risks identified in the annual review; and
- The implementation of procedures designed to minimise or manage any potential impact on the charity should those risks materialise.

A Risk Register is in place and is reviewed annually. The most recent review of the Register was carried out in June 2023.

Areas of risk for the organisation were reviewed and assessed. These included risks relating to Governance & Management, Operational, Financial, People and External factors affecting the organisation.

#### Objectives and Activities

##### Charity Objects:

1. To contribute to a more inclusive and welcoming society by working together as a partnership of member Churches by:

# Youth Link NI

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### Trustees' Annual Report (Incorporating the Chief Executive Officer's Report) (continued)

#### Year ended 31 March 2024

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- Working in partnership towards the building of voluntary, social and reconciliation capacity within civil society and local communities.
  - Creating positive opportunities for cross-community experiences at local, national, and international levels.
  - Promoting the inclusive involvement of young people at all levels.
2. To enable, support and encourage churches to offer a more effective ministry to young people in order to promote their spiritual, social, and personal development by:
- Helping Youth Link: NI and member Churches to maximize existing and new resources in the service of young people.
  - Facilitating the development of youth work practitioners through collaborative education and training.
  - Sharing experiences, resources, and ideas amongst the churches to enhance the overall provision for young people.

#### Vision

Churches working together to build excellence in youth work and ministry towards a just, peaceful, and flourishing society based on the common good.

#### Mission Statement

Youth Link's mission is to:

- Support young people to achieve their full potential.
- Enable young people and youth practitioners to be agents of transformation and hope.
- Promote and provide excellence in youth work and leadership training.
- Encourage and equip young people to participate in Church and community and in the building of a peaceful and inclusive society.
- Partner with Church bodies, youth organisations and relevant sectors with responsibility for young people and youth practitioners.
- Facilitate the development of youth work and ministry within and on behalf of the Churches.
- Integrate equity, diversity, and interdependence into all aspects of policy and practice in youth work and ministry.

#### Value Base

Central to Youth Link is the Christian faith which commits us to:

- Building positive relationships.
- The personal, social, and spiritual development of young people.
- Improving young peoples' lives through positive outcomes in youth work and ministry.
- Encourage and support youth practitioners in their personal and professional development.
- Developing effective and strategic partnerships.
- Building relationships that enable transformation in the lives of individuals and communities.
- Promote respect, trust, and inclusivity within a culturally diverse society.
- Fairness in provision of service.
- Integrity and accountability in all aspects of our work.

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### Trustees' Annual Report (Incorporating the Chief Executive Officer's Report) (continued)

Year ended 31 March 2024

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- Nurturing global awareness and interdependence within the human and environmental community.
- Applying theological and ethical understanding to youth work practice and to public and community life.
- Promote justice, peace, healing, and reconciliation in society.

#### Strategic Aims

1. As a partnership of churches working together, Youth Link will contribute to a more **inclusive** and peaceful society by **enabling** young people and youth practitioners to build positive, healthy, and sustainable **relationships** within and between communities through education, **training**, and empowerment programmes.
2. Responsive to a changing environment Youth Link will ensure the provision of a sustainable **quality** service through **effective** and professional **leadership & management**.
3. Youth Link will raise the **profile** of the organisation as a unique model of faith based **collaborative** youth work in the churches, community, and voluntary sector.

#### Strategic Aim 1

As a partnership of churches working together, Youth Link will contribute to a more **inclusive** and peaceful society by **enabling** young people and youth practitioners to build positive, healthy, and sustainable **relationships** within and between communities through education, **training**, and empowerment programmes.

#### Outcomes

- 1.1 Young people and youth practitioners will have positive healthy and sustainable relationships within and between communities.
- 1.2 Services that respond to the changing needs of young people.
- 1.3 Increased capacity among young people and youth practitioners in youth work and ministry.
- 1.4 Increased knowledge and skills among youth practitioners to promote building a peaceful and inclusive society.
- 1.5 Enhanced knowledge and skills among youth practitioners to engage young people in CRED related work.
- 1.6 Increased mutual understanding, tolerance, hospitality, and respect among young people from different socio-economic, educational, cultural, ethnic, and religious backgrounds.
- 1.7 Increased capacity and social capital among young people from areas of disadvantage and social exclusion.

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### Company Limited by Guarantee

### Trustees' Annual Report (Incorporating the Chief Executive Officer's Report) (continued)

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#### Strategic Aim 2

Responsive to a changing environment Youth Link will ensure the provision of a sustainable **quality** service through **effective** and professional **leadership and management**.

#### Outcomes

- 2.1 Provision of a sustainable quality service that responds to changes within the social, political, and economic environment.
- 2.2 Effective and professional leadership, management, and governance.
- 2.3 Effective management of financial resources.
- 2.4 Integrity and accountability in governance and management of Youth Link.

#### Strategic Aim 3

Youth Link will raise the **profile** of the organisation as a unique model of faith based **collaborative** youth work in the churches, community, and voluntary sector.

#### Outcomes

- 3.1 Recognition of Youth Link as a unique model of faith based collaborative youth work in the churches, community, and voluntary sector.
- 3.2 Recognition of Youth Link as a prophetic voice within the Churches and the wider community in relation to current issues in youth work and ministry, peace building and reconciliation

#### Public Benefit Statement:

In shaping objectives for the year and planning activities, the Trustees have considered the Charity Commission's guidance on public benefit.

The direct benefits which flow from Youth Link's purposes include the following:

- Members of Protestant and Catholic Churches in Northern Ireland and its border counties working together to promote understanding of one another's backgrounds and to improve and develop relationships.
- Young people drawn from Protestant and Catholic communities based in Northern Ireland and its border counties meet those from different backgrounds and work with them towards developing an informed understanding of their own and each other's backgrounds and religions.
- Relationships between those drawn from different communities and backgrounds in Northern Ireland and its border counties are developed and enhanced in a positive way.

## **Youth Link NI**

### **Company Limited by Guarantee**

### **Trustees' Annual Report (Incorporating the Chief Executive Officer's Report)** *(continued)*

#### **Year ended 31 March 2024**

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- Church leaders and youth workers are given support in their ministry to young people through provision of accredited and non-accredited youth work and community relations training opportunities specifically tailored to meet the needs of young people in Northern Ireland.
- Youth work practitioners are supported, and their professional development enhanced through the provision of collaborative education and training opportunities by Youth Link.
- Opportunities are provided for church leaders and youth workers drawn from Youth Link's member Churches to meet together to share experiences, resources, and ideas to enhance their ministry to young people.

These benefits are capable of being demonstrated through:

- Number of young people achieving accreditation in Youth Work and / or Community Relations Programmes at Level 1 and / or Level 2 through OCN NI.
- Number of youth workers / youth practitioners achieving accreditation in Youth Work and / or Community Relations Programmes at Level 2 and / or Level 3 through OCN NI.
- Number of young people and youth workers / youth practitioners participating in knowledge, skills and competency-based peace building and reconciliation programmes.
- Number of young people and youth workers / youth practitioners participating in Peace Building and Reconciliation Conferences.
- Number of youth workers / youth practitioners completing Youth Link's Apprenticeship Peace Programme.
- Number of youth workers graduating with BA Honours Degree in Youth Work (NSETS).
- Number of young people having no or little previous education, employment, or training completing accredited programmes at Levels 1 and 2.
- Number of young people progressing from accredited programmes at Levels 1, 2 and 3 to the apprenticeship and degree level programmes.
- Number of young people, voluntary youth leaders, full and part-time youth workers, theological students and clergy across Northern Ireland and the Border Counties participating in non-accredited programmes in Youth Work, Youth Ministry and Community Relations Skills and Issues.
- Number of church and community groups participating in bespoke and accredited training programmes.
- Feedback from Youth Link's stakeholders, including young people, youth workers, course participants and church leaders.
- Production and circulation of regular publicity documents including annual reports, annual accounts, e-newsletter, press releases etc.
- Independent external evaluations of Youth Link's service.
- Improved relationships between communities in Northern Ireland and its border counties evidenced by local government surveys.

The intended beneficiaries of these purposes are:

- Members of the churches and faith-based youth organisations in Northern Ireland and its border counties.
- Young people drawn from different religious and cultural backgrounds based in Northern Ireland and its border counties.
- Full and part-time youth workers / youth work practitioners and voluntary youth leaders.
- Theological students, clergy, and church leaders.
- Members of ethnic minority backgrounds and Section 75 groups.

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### Trustees' Annual Report (Incorporating the Chief Executive Officer's Report) (continued)

Year ended 31 March 2024

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- There is no harm or potential for harm as a result of the purposes being carried out.

#### **Achievements and Performance**

**Strategic Aim 1** As a partnership of churches working together, Youth Link will contribute to a more **inclusive** and peaceful society by **enabling** young people and youth practitioners to build positive, healthy, and sustainable **relationships** within and between communities through education, **training**, and empowerment programmes.

Youth Link continues to be one of the largest providers of accredited youth work training in Northern Ireland and provides a coherent training route that offers young people and adult volunteers a progressive pathway into youth work and ministry. More than 300 young people and adult volunteers received accreditation during 2023/24 and staff continued to work constructively to further develop training at youth and adult level in urban, rural and border regions. There were also over 500 young people and adults engaged in non-accredited programmes.

Youth Link continued to support Strategic Planning and Review of youth work and ministry within the Northern Catholic Dioceses affiliated to Youth Link and meetings with key stakeholders and Bishops has taken place.

#### **Degree Programme:**

The current partnership with Moorlands College will conclude in June 2024 due to lower demand for places. During 2023/34 the Senior Tutor left the organisation after making a significant contribution to the Degree programme for over 10 years and this transition was handled successfully as a new appointment was made. Youth Link will ensure the current cohort of students successfully complete their studies and to celebrate the last 16 years of the provision of NSETS professionally endorsed undergraduate Degree pathway for Christian Youth Work students on the Island of Ireland.

Aspects to celebrate:

- The commitment, resilience and competence of the wider staff team and sessional workers to maintain the progression of students and deliver the programme.
- The first Youth Link students at Moorlands College graduated in November 2023 at Christchurch Campus in Dorset. Students and their families celebrated this significant moment in the studies and faith journey. Post-graduation employment rates continue to be strong for students. As of May 2024, all of the graduates are in full time employment.
- The final cohort of students marked their last day of their studies with a celebration event and thanksgiving service at Youth Link in May 2024, Family, Friends and Placement supervisors joined them on this special day.
- The Irish American Partnership has enabled students from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds to access Higher Education and this year several students have benefited directly.

#### **Youth Work Training Programmes:**

Youth Link NI's full suite of accredited training programmes are still in high demand. Delivery is taking place at Youth Link's Training and Resource centre, in the community and online. The OCN NI Level 1, 2 & 3 Award/Certificate in Youth Work Practice courses have proved successful, providing wide geographical spread, pathway opportunities to further training, degree programme and career

## **Youth Link NI**

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### **Trustees' Annual Report (Incorporating the Chief Executive Officer's Report)** *(continued)*

#### **Year ended 31 March 2024**

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opportunities. Youth Link has maintained OCN NI centre status and has had several external verification visits as part of the quality assurance process. Our team of over 30 sessional workers play a key role in the delivery of these accredited training courses and are central to the work of Youth Link.

Youth Link appointed a Training & Development Officer as there had been a gap in the organisation since the departure of key staff. This appointment will enable the organisation to maintain OCN NI centre status and provide support to the OCN NI Centre Administrator and sessional workers in the organisation. Representation on the Youth Work Sector Skills Advisory Group (YWSSAG) and the review of current accredited programmes is ongoing.

#### **Community Relations and Peace and Reconciliation Projects**

The Research and Curriculum Development Officer is researching current trends and working on a project around the Practice of Integrated Reconciliation. Work is ongoing on a Four Walls resource which is an educational resource for youth workers and young people aimed at enriching knowledge, attitudes, and skills for addressing sectarianism, dealing with the past and building a reconciled society. Research and Curriculum Development Officer managed the Department of Foreign Affairs – Reconciliation Fund, The Executive Office and the Rank Foundation staff who all had a community relations component to their work. The Common Good Curriculum resource materials are being disseminated and integrated into Youth Link programmes and in particular the TEO funded Community Cohesion Project. The resource continues to be made available to the churches, youth sector and post-primary schools.

Progress continued to be made in the development and delivery of Community Relations Equality & Diversity (CRED) initiatives through funding secured in 2023/24 through the Education Authority – TBUC Camps programme, The Executive Office (TEO), Community Relations Council NI, Department of Foreign Affairs & Trade Reconciliation Fund and the Rank Foundation.

Youth Link provided several seminars during Good Relations Week and were involved in the celebrations of the Irish Council of Churches & Irish Inter-church meeting that marked their respective anniversaries. Youth Link gave a presentation at the Commonwealth Youth Work Conference and represented at Reconciliation forum in Weimar, Germany with the Glenree Peace and Reconciliation Centre. Youth Link have also hosted several workshops for International groups including students from USA and Academics from the TELOS organisation exploring the role of churches in peacebuilding. It has also been involved more locally in several regional 'Together Building United Communities' engagement forums. There have been several roundtable discussions organised including the 'Welcome to the Table' event with Evangelical Alliance and the Jethro Centre.

The Good Relations and Church engagement project played a key role in developing an inter-church youth forum that empowered young people to share their perspectives on the concept of a shared island and to ensure the voice of young people from faith-based youth organisations are heard. One of the young people involved spoke at the One Young World event held in Belfast in October 2023.

Youth Work and Peace and Reconciliation work is at the core of the work of Youth Link and it was significant that the staff and organisation were invited to many celebration events marking the anniversary of the Good Friday Agreement. TBUC engagement Forum and Reconciliation Forum are a key opportunity to network and listen to grassroots issues. Youth Link received an exceptional achievement award for contribution to Community Relations in Northern Ireland in March 2024.

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Year ended 31 March 2024

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**Strategic Aim 2** Responsive to a changing environment Youth Link will ensure the provision of a sustainable **quality** service through **effective** and professional **leadership & management**.

Youth Link's skilled and experienced staff team is a valuable asset and as such human resource matters are reviewed by Trustees regularly. During the year and despite the pandemic staff continued to meet with their line managers formally for support and supervision and annual appraisals were completed. Staff and Leadership Team meetings continued to be held on a regular basis. A Register of Sessional Workers is maintained, and suitably qualified and experienced people support delivery of programmes of work across the organisation. Professional development opportunities offered to staff during the year included: payment of off-line supervision and other professional services, ILM Level 7 Certificate in Strategic Leadership & Management, First Aid Training, TQUK Level 3 Award in Education and Training, Advanced Diploma in Accounting, CINI Designated Safeguarding Training BA (Hons) Applied Theology (Youth & Community Work) and OCNNI Assessor & Internal Quality Assurance Training.

Financial resources and management of same are discussed and reviewed by Trustees regularly. Management accounting information presented regularly includes income and expenditure reports reviewed against budgets, summary of cash held, cash flow report, review of current debtors and creditors, credit card expenditure etc. Reports are regularly brought to Trustees summarising fundraising efforts, management of secured restricted funds and reporting requirements met. The Annual Accounts for the year ending 31 March 2023 were agreed and signed by Trustees at the General Meeting on 12 September 2023 – these complied with Charities Act (NI) 2008, Companies Act 2006, Statement of Recommended Practice (FRS 102) which came into effect on 1 January 2015.

Successful funding applications from PEACEPLUS project will have an impact on Youth Link during 2024 -2027 with an increase in staffing and outputs. Fundable projects / programmes and possible sources of funding are identified regularly, funding secured during the year included monies from the Education Authority -Regional funded projects and T:BUC programmes; Department of Foreign Affairs & Trade – Reconciliation Fund; Belfast City Council Good Relations Programme, Community Relations Council, The Executive Office, The Irish American Partnership and Halifax.

Youth Link's Training & Resource Centre continues to be maintained to a high standard and facilities are reviewed at regular intervals with adjustments being made to meet the needs of students and other stakeholders. A 'Buildings Manual' and 'Maintenance Schedules' are in place, providing information about repairs, providers, and maintenance contracts. Health & Safety remains a priority and full risk assessment has been carried out. Maintenance of ICT systems are provided by an external consultant and improvements to systems have been made as we transition from Server-based to Cloud-based infrastructure. Insurance policies were reviewed during the year as required and were renewed in March 2024. The procurement policy is adhered to when purchasing goods or services and the Asset Register was formally reviewed and updated during the year.

Membership of Board of Directors and attendance by members is monitored in accordance with stipulations provided for in Memorandum & Articles of Association. Trustee meetings were held in person and, option to join via Zoom, since June 2020 to demonstrate and ensure good governance of the charity, as permitted by the Charity Commission. The Annual Confirmation Statement was submitted to Companies House on 30 January 2023 for the period to 30 January 2024. Trustee records held by Companies House and The Charity Commission for Northern Ireland are updated regularly throughout the year. Annual accounts for the year ending 31 March 2023 were submitted to Companies House and Charity Commission NI. The Charity Commission NI Annual Monitoring

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### Trustees' Annual Report (Incorporating the Chief Executive Officer's Report) (continued)

#### Year ended 31 March 2024

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Return for the financial period ending 31 March 2023 was submitted on 14 November 2023.

A review of the Risk Register was carried out on 5<sup>th</sup> June 2023 and the Register subsequently updated and agreed at Council on 13<sup>th</sup> June 2023. Identification of risks included: managing change and loss of funding and inability to sustain current staffing levels led to agreed actions by the board. A review of the 5 Year Strategic Plan commenced in May 2023 with an external consultant and the process is ongoing. A decision was made at our June 2023 council meeting to extend our current Strategic Plan until after the Strategic Review is complete. There was a Staff & Trustee – Strategic Review held in October 2023, reflecting on the past, present and future direction of the organisation. The new Strategic Plan for 2024-2028 will be brought to Trustees for discussion at Council in June 2024 and will be disseminated to key stakeholders. In accordance with General Data Protection Regulations relevant materials were disposed of during the year. The 'Register of Interests' in respect of Trustees and staff was updated in November 2023. Induction and training sessions were held for two new Trustees during the year. A review of the 'Safeguarding Policy' was carried out and agreed by Council in March 2024. A review of the 'Adults at Risk of Harm & in Need of Protection Policy' was carried out and agreed by Trustees in March 2024.

Written reports outlining progress against objectives were presented by staff at Council meetings held in June and December 2023. Qualitative and quantitative reports were submitted to funders as required.

**Strategic Aim 3** Youth Link will raise the **profile** of the organisation as a unique model of faith based **collaborative** youth work in the churches, community, and voluntary sector.

During the year collaborative working partnerships continued to develop with local church and community based youth groups through the provision of placements for young people and young adults engaged in accredited training at Levels 1, 2 & 3 and in the Degree Programme. Youth Link has also engaged with the Irish Council of Churches during their 100<sup>th</sup> Year Anniversary and representation at Irish Inter-church meeting. Youth Link has strategically partnered with Summer Madness & the Four Corners Festival delivering workshops. Youth Link were selected to deliver a Peace and Reconciliation workshop at the prestigious One Young World conference hosted in Belfast in October 2023 and this gave us a Global Platform to share the good news of Youth Link.

Youth Link has been successful in being awarded funding by PEACEPLUS Youth Programme managed by the Special European Union Programmes Body. The Empower to Transform Project has been a significant collaboration between YMCA (Lead Partner), Youth Link, Youth Initiatives and Mencap NI. Youth Link has also been successful in another PEACEPLUS consortium bid with Youth Action NI in the Shared Learning – Informal Education, funded priority area. These collaborations raise the profile of the organisation and demonstrate the high quality work in the church sector. Connections with local church projects at the grassroots are central to the success of these projects.

Youth Link's marketing plan and strategy continues to be reviewed and refined with the ongoing developments within the organisation and sector. There will be a review of the Social Media channels and Website engagement in line with Strategic and Operational plans. The Rank Foundation funded engagement officer will help Youth Link to raise its profile in the wider community. There was launch of the 'Wee Peace' Podcast, a monthly series exploring grassroots youth work and peacebuilding.

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Through the Department of Education Youth Policy Review Group, Education Authority Regional Advisory Group, Regional Voluntary Youth Organisations Forum (Network Youth), North South Educational Training Standards (NSETS), Community Faith Forum (NICVA) and other youth sector fora, staff continued at a time of significant change to ensure that the voice and needs of the Churches' and faith-based youth sector are represented and advocated. A significant time commitment is involved not just for the actual meetings but also pre/post consultations and discussions with other colleagues across the sector. It is of benefit to Youth Link to have such involvement, not least for the positive profile the organisation derives and influence it can bring.

End of project celebration of learning events were held for all those involved in the TEO funded youth projects in March 2024 and celebrations of students completing the BA Honours Degree Applied Theology & Youth Work took place in May 2023 and November 2023 at the graduation.

Youth Link continued to present and measure the effectiveness of its yearly programme of work drawing on an Outcome Based Accountability (OBA) Framework and will conduct a social value analysis with Community Relations Council.

Youth Link celebrated the life of former employee Leancha Smith who sadly passed away in August 2023. Her contribution to Youth Work and Peace and reconciliation raised the profile of the organisation during her time with the organisation and she will leave behind a legacy through the impact she had on young people with her faith and zest for life.

#### Financial review

During the financial year ending 31 March 2024, Youth Link's incoming resources decreased by £210,869, 35%, represented by a decrease in unrestricted income of 37% and a decrease in restricted income of 34%. Expenditure during the year decreased by £213,663, 28%, represented by a decrease in expenditure from unrestricted funds of £42,177, 11%, and a decrease in expenditure from restricted funds of £171,486, 46%.

During the year the following changes in income were noted:

- Member church contributions increased by 2% and each diocese of the Catholic Church now pay their contributions separately whilst these used to be paid from Central Funds in one lump payment.
- Degree programme income decreased by 62% due to the decision to end the BA (Hons) Applied Theology (Youth & Community Work) with JNC degree through Moorlands College. The final year group of students will conclude their studies in June 2024.
- Course fees decreased by 9%. One notable change is that no new tenders were applied for with the Housing Executive during 2023/2024 due to staff capacity limitations.
- Donation Income decreased by 49%. This was due to a one-off donation of £1,000 made by a previous employee which was received in the previous financial year.
- The Rental of Facilities charged to the degree programme decreased by 35% due to the fact one year group remains on the degree in 23/24 rather than 2-year groups as in the previous year.
- Bank Interest rates rose in the year causing an increase in bank interest received of 72%. Fixed term deposit accounts remain maturing at weekly rates to maximise interest received.
- Other Income decreased by 97%. In the previous year, a large refund was received from British Telecom for overcharges.
- Funding for three projects with The Education Authority granted in the 22/23 accounts concluded and funding was not applied for in 23/24.
- Four new funding sources was secured in 2023/24 from The Education Authority – T:BUC Camps Programme, The Halifax Foundation, The Department of Foreign Affairs Annual Reconciliation Fund and SEUPB for the 'Empower to Transform' project which will run for four years.

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Restricted funds held at year end equate to £43,830. Last year, total restricted funds held were £19,614, an overall increase of 123%. The restricted funds are held in respect of ongoing Community Relations and youth work programme expenses.

During the year support costs, including governance costs, decreased by 8% to £130,406. Support Costs decreased by 7% and Governance Costs decreased by 16%.

#### ***Investment powers and policy***

The Trustees, having regard to the liquidity requirements of the charity, have kept available funds in an interest-bearing deposit account and seek to achieve a rate on deposit which matches or exceeds inflation measured by the retail prices index.

#### ***Reserves policy and going concern.***

The Executive Council has examined the charity's requirements for reserves considering the main risks to the organisation. It has established a policy whereby the unrestricted funds not designated for a particular purpose or invested in tangible assets held by the charity should be between 3 to 6 months of expenditure.

The reserves are needed to meet the working capital requirements of the charity and the Executive Council are confident that at this level they would be able to continue the current activities of the charity in the event of a significant drop in funding.

As of 31 March 2024, the charity held total funds of £748,279. £43,830 are restricted funds, £0 are designated funds and £704,449 are funds that can only be realised by disposing of tangible fixed assets. The free unrestricted reserves of £288,672 represent six months running costs which is in the target range. The Executive Council and management continue to work to secure additional unrestricted reserves and accept that this is a difficult challenge in the current economic climate.

#### **Plans for future periods.**

Youth Link plans to continue with its activities as outlined above in the forthcoming years, subject to satisfactory funding arrangements.

#### **Trustees' responsibilities statement**

The trustees, who are also directors for the purposes of company law, are responsible for preparing the trustees' report and the financial statements in accordance with applicable law and United Kingdom Accounting Standards (United Kingdom Generally Accepted Accounting Practice).

Company law requires the charity trustees to prepare financial statements for each year which give a true and fair view of the state of affairs of the charitable company and the incoming resources and application of resources, including the income and expenditure, for that period.

In preparing these financial statements, the trustees are required to:

- Select suitable accounting policies and then apply them consistently.
- Observe the methods and principles in the applicable Charities SORP.

## Youth Link NI

### Company Limited by Guarantee

### Trustees' Annual Report (Incorporating the Chief Executive Officer's Report) (continued)

Year ended 31 March 2024

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- Make judgments and accounting estimates that are reasonable and prudent.
- Prepare the financial statements on the going concern basis unless it is inappropriate to presume that the charity will continue in business.

The trustees are responsible for keeping adequate accounting records that are sufficient to show and explain the charity's transactions and disclose with reasonable accuracy at any time the financial position of the charity and enable them to ensure that the financial statements comply with the Companies Act 2006. They are also responsible for safeguarding the assets of the charity and hence for taking reasonable steps for the prevention and detection of fraud and other irregularities.

#### Auditor

Each of the persons who is a trustee at the date of approval of this report confirms that:

- so far as they are aware, there is no relevant audit information of which the charity's auditor is unaware; and
- they have taken all steps that they ought to have taken as a trustee to make themselves aware of any relevant audit information and to establish that the charity's auditor is aware of that information.

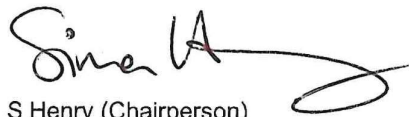
#### Small company provisions

This report has been prepared in accordance with the provisions applicable to companies entitled to the small companies exemption.

The trustees' annual report was approved on 24 September 2024 and signed on behalf of the board of trustees by:



D McWall (Treasurer)  
Trustee



S Henry (Chairperson)  
Trustee