



Religious Hatred Consultation  
c/o Wilma Smith  
SEJD Criminal Justice Division  
Area 1WR  
St Andrew's House  
Regent Road  
Edinburgh  
EH1 3DG

20 March 2003

Dear Ms Smith

**Report of the Cross-Party Working Group on Religious Hatred**

YouthLink Scotland welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Scottish Executive's consultation on the Report of the Cross-Party Working Group on Religious Hatred ("the Report on Religious Hatred").

YouthLink Scotland is the national youth agency for Scotland. We promote the well-being and development of young people in a local, national and global context. We are a national voluntary organisation serving the needs of young people, and those who work with them. We take the view that sectarianism and religious hatred have often overshadowed Scotland's history, and sadly continue to exert a baneful influence within our society. Against this background, YouthLink Scotland believes that the work of the Cross Party Working Group, and its publication of the Report on Religious Hatred, has made a useful and timely contribution to the fight against sectarianism and other forms of religious hatred.

The Report on Religious Hatred signposts the negative impact which sectarianism and religious hatred have had in Scotland, and recognises the strong arguments in support of introducing some form of legislation to combat their influence. In December 2002 these arguments were accepted by the Scottish Parliament's Justice 2 Committee, which agreed amendments lodged by Donald Gorrie MSP to the Criminal Justice Bill. The amendments will make the motivation of religious or sectarian hatred aggravation of a criminal offence for the purpose of sentencing. This fulfils one of the key recommendations of the Report on Religious Hatred, which had highlighted that some form of legislation was necessary to "ensure that aggravation based on religious prejudice is taken into account when sentencing the accused".

YouthLink Scotland welcomes these amendments which will help to tackle the blight of sectarianism and other forms of religious hatred in Scotland, and to provide

increased protection against crimes involving religious hatred. The amended Criminal Justice Bill, which has now been passed by the Scottish Parliament and is likely to come into force in the next month or so, will send out a clear message that Scotland will not tolerate religious or sectarian hatred. It will also underline the gravity of offences motivated by religious hatred, and lead to greater consistency in sentencing. In addition, the amended legislation will promote the keeping of records and statistics which is necessary to monitor the effectiveness of the law, and to determine if further legislation will be required.

YouthLink Scotland strongly welcomes the amendments to the Criminal Justice Bill, but shares the Cross Party Working Group's view that legislation by itself will not be enough to tackle the deep rooted problem of religious hatred within our society, and that the introduction of legislation must be accompanied by a whole package of measures designed to promote "changes in practice, culture and attitude to combat religious prejudice on a wider front". In this respect, we welcome the 12 recommendations identified by the Cross Party Working Group. YouthLink Scotland believes that these recommendations will, if progressed by the Scottish Executive and other agencies as appropriate, make a significant contribution to the fight against religious hatred and sectarianism.

YouthLink Scotland considers that the Scottish Executive should, when implementing these important recommendations, also acknowledge the major contribution that youth work can make to the development of young people as tolerant members of society. Furthermore, the Scottish Executive must recognise, as part of any wider package of measures introduced to combat religious hatred, the important role that young people and youth work bodies can play in the fight against bigotry and sectarianism. This is evident in the involvement of young people and youth work bodies in a wide range of imaginative and innovative community based projects.

These projects include, for example, the 'Blinded by Bigotry' video and education pack produced by the M2K Group, which was established by young women from the Greater Easterhouse and Eastend areas of Glasgow. This ground breaking project, combining drama, humour and social comment, highlighted the impact of religious hatred in the Greater Easterhouse and Eastend areas of Glasgow. It received funding and support from Glasgow City Council, the Scottish Arts Council, the Prince's Trust and the National Lotteries Charities Board. The M2K Group organised a series of events with children in schools, and with young people, using the 'Blinded by Bigotry' video and education pack to highlight and challenge the ignorance underpinning religious hatred and sectarianism.

YouthLink Scotland is seeking to build upon the work already undertaken in projects such as 'Blinded by Bigotry'. Reflecting this, YouthLink Scotland and MORI Scotland plan to establish an annual '*State of the Nation*' poll of young people in Scotland. It is intended that this poll will provide an authoritative picture of the views of young people in Scotland (12 - 25 year olds), including their attitudes towards members of other communities within Scotland, and to sectarianism. Up to 3,000 young people will take part in the project. YouthLink Scotland is also giving careful consideration to supporting initiatives similar to the 'Blinded by Bigotry' project under the auspices of the Young Roots programme, which makes available grants of up to £25,000 for projects involving young people in the heritage of the UK. Young

Roots is funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund, and managed by the National Youth Agency (“NYA”). The NYA is working in partnership with YouthLink Scotland and Heritage Lottery Fund Scotland to deliver the programme in Scotland. Expressions of interest for grants under the Young Roots programme have already been received from young people in North Lanark who wish to undertake a project which will analyse the historical background and roots of religious hatred and sectarianism in Scotland. It has been proposed that the project will involve art and photography, and will develop an education pack for use in schools and with young people. It is hoped that North Lanarkshire Council will also be able to provide support for this project.

Other projects are currently being explored by young people within Polmont Young Offenders’ Institute who are considering making an application to the Young Roots programme for funding to support a project which will investigate the issues of bigotry and sectarianism within the closed community of the young offenders’ establishment. This project will draw on the experiences of the young people both within their home communities, and within the young offenders’ institute. The project at Polmont will, along with similar projects such as the ‘Blinded by Bigotry’ and the North Lanark projects, provide a benchmark for the views and issues encountered by a marginalised group of young people. There is potential partnership working arrangements with a wide range of arts and music based organisations, as the group intends to explore the origins of, and the use of music to promote and encourage, bigotry. YouthLink Scotland’s projects, by focusing on young people, will help to challenge the crude stereotypes and misconceptions fuelling bigotry. The Scottish Executive can assist young people and youth work bodies tackle religious hatred by supporting such projects. This support is vital if the Scottish Executive is to work effectively with the voluntary sector, and with other agencies, to successfully break the bleak cycle of religious bigotry and sectarianism in Scotland.

YouthLink Scotland also wishes to highlight the significant work undertaken by YouthNet, and by JEDI (Joined in Equity Diversity and Interdependence), in developing the equality agenda and combating religious hatred and bigotry in Northern Ireland. YouthNet is the Voluntary Youth Network for Northern Ireland. It is the representative body for the voluntary youth sector in Northern Ireland. YouthNet is involved in a number of projects with organisations which work with young people, designed to progress the equality agenda within Northern Ireland. It is also a member of JEDI which is a youth service partnership committed to promoting a new vision of community through sectoral, organisational and personal transformation. The key overriding principles of JEDI are:

**Equity:** A fairness, including the redressing of any identified undesirable or inequitable balance.

**Diversity:** Encouraging respect for and expression of the range of identities represented by the youth of Northern Ireland and those who work with them in the youth sector.

**Interdependence:** Recognising and exploring the ways in which individual paths are intertwined and building new relationships between the various people and groups who make up the population of these islands.

JEDI is one response to the challenge of reconstructing society as part of the Northern Ireland Peace Process. JEDI is funded by the International Fund for Ireland

(Community Bridges Programme), the Department of Education (European Structural Funds), the Education and Library Boards and the Youth Council for Northern Ireland. JEDI is committed to embedding the equity, diversity and interdependence (“EDI”) principles into the culture and practice of youth work in Northern Ireland in order to make an effective contribution to the Northern Ireland Peace Process and to the reconstruction of society in Northern Ireland.

A major part of JEDI’s work has been developing an audit tool which can be used to evaluate the culture existing within voluntary and statutory organisations, and providing training in areas such as community relations and equity, diversity and interdependence. Examples of such audits include the JEDI audit of community relations and education for citizenship within the Northern Ireland Youth Service, and YouthNet’s involvement, together with a wide range of its member organisations, in a policy development process. During this process organisations audited their structures and policies with a view to determining where organisations stood in terms of the practice of equity, the celebration of diversity and the recognition of interdependence. Following the audit, organisations will begin to develop structures and policies underpinned by EDI principles. YouthLink Scotland believes that there would be considerable merit in the Cross Party Working Group, and the Scottish Executive, meeting representatives from YouthNet and from JEDI to discuss the strategies and Best Practice which have already been developed in these areas as part of the Northern Ireland Peace Process.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you require more information, or would like to discuss this matter further.

Yours sincerely

Maureen Mallon  
Head of Development