

## **1.0 Introduction**

NICCY's role is to safeguard and promote the rights and best interests of children and young people. In doing so, we follow the guiding principles of the UNCRC, its minimum standards being the basis from which to assess the adequacy and effectiveness of law and policy.

Although not enshrined in domestic legislation, in signing up to the Convention, the UK government has made a clear commitment to children that it will adhere to the rights set out therein. For that reason, as a means of going some way towards fulfilling the government's obligations under Articles 3 (the best interests of the child should be paramount) and 4 (all rights of the UNCRC should be made available to all children) of the UNCRC, NICCY believes that all government strategies, policies and plans should be subject to a full Children's Rights Impact Assessment by the relevant Department.

Whilst NICCY appreciates that there are often complexities when reconciling the rights of children and young people with their welfare and best interests, we recommend that the following UNCRC Articles are incorporated into the development of the Northern Ireland Network For Youth (NINFY) as underlying principles:-

- Article 2- all children have the right to non-discrimination, i.e. the rights in the Convention must be respected, regardless of the child's race, colour, sex, ethnic origin, or status, or that of the child's legal guardians.
- Article 3(1) - the best interests of the child must be a primary consideration in decisions made by legislative bodies or administrative authorities.
- Article 4- State Parties shall take all necessary steps to make these rights available to all children.
- Article 12 – States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.
- Article 13- The child shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information.
- Article 17- Every child has the right to access information from a variety of sources to enable them to make decisions and choices in their lives.

## **2.0 Northern Ireland Network For Youth**

At the time of writing, NICCY understands that the central aim of the NINFY will be to **'strengthen the direct voice of young people in all relevant aspects of government provision'**.



In the information provided it states that ...“It is essential that children and young people play a big part in shaping NINFY, and so a ‘youth friendly’ version of the paper will be circulated widely to a range of relevant groups” and... “It is also important that the design of NINFY is part of an overarching and coherent system for children and young people’s participation”

However, there is no evidence or indication that young people will be, or are part of the working group at this stage in developing the range of options to be delivered to the Department of Education. This being the case, NICCY recommends that the working group includes young people in the planning and development of NINFY, ensuring meaningful involvement at the upper end of the participation spectrum.

### **3.0 Pre-consultation questions**

NICCY’s responses to the suggested questions are outlined below.

#### **3.1 What is your vision of an ideal NINFY?**

- NINFY would provide the space and resources for all young people to have an opportunity to have their voices heard. This would include young people from the following (not exhaustive) list:
  - Schools / school councils
  - Youth clubs / youth organisations
  - Voluntary / interest groups
  - Shadow Youth Councils
  - Young people involved with youth justice
  - Young people in care
  - Disabled young people
  - Youth People from ethnic minority backgrounds
  - Young carers
- NINFY should be endorsed and supported pro-actively by **all** government departments.
- There should be a clear process where all young people can discuss local issues on a local level, feeding into one regional body with representatives going onto national and international forums.
- NINFY should endorse the inclusion of the UNCRC in the NI Bill of Rights
- NINFY should audit current participation levels of children and young people in the voluntary / community / statutory sectors for future benchmarking of development



### **3.2 What sort of values and principles should NINFY adopt?**

- Participation of children and young people is a right and should be central to all activities, i.e. it is built into planning, implementation and delivery
- Participation is real and meaningful, not just on paper. Adults should be prepared to adjust their working practices to ensure the voices of children and young people are listened to
- NINFY should work in partnership with other statutory and voluntary organisations to develop models of best practice and ensure joined up thinking
- Respect not expect! Respect is not automatic; it needs to be earned by all those involved. Honesty and trust are essential.
- We should invest in our young people by investing in staff to allow the time and space to work with young people

### **3.3 What functions should NINFY cover?**

- Training & Development
  - Staff – to develop skills / confidence to work with young people
  - Young people – to develop communication skills, personal development, etc
- Funding provision
- The support of a youth panel/forum
- Map current and potential statutory ( Government Depts/ NDPBs / statutory youth orgs & clubs / schools, etc) and voluntary (uniformed orgs/ voluntary youth orgs, etc) levels of participation involving children and young people with ongoing monitoring and periodic evaluation
- Mainstreaming standards of participation across NI and ensuring there is a process for quality assurance
- Facilitating debate
- Development of high level representative youth body similar perhaps to a NI Youth Parliament that all young people can feed into (see 3.1 for examples of target groups above)
- Have a dedicated Participation Unit
- Train Government departments in working with c&yp
- Involve young people in Policy Development
- Consultation: Provision of system to producing 'young person friendly' documents and associated material
- Training young people in equality and recruitment procedures and provide opportunities to sit on recruitment panels when recruiting youth workers, etc
- Signposting to additional services
- Provide library of resources



**3.4 How would NINFY link with existing participative structures for children and young people?**

- NINFY should adopt a specific model of participation, e.g. Harts Ladder or Shier's Pathways to Participation Model and use that as the basis for their participative framework to ensure that young people voices are heard. Then something like the Hear by Right framework to monitor and evaluate this process could be used
- There will also be the need to create new structures (and associated model of best practice) to ensure that young people have a conduit to participate from local to regional forum and beyond
- Work in open and inclusive partnerships where appropriate
- Communicate aims, objectives and specific projects clearly to other organisations who work with young people

**3.5 Are there any existing models in the UK or internationally that would be relevant to this initiative?**

Elements could be taken from many of the following:

- British Columbia Ministry for Children and Families' Youth Participation Strategy (YPS)
- Ann Arbor Youth Senate
- San Francisco Youth Commission
- Welsh Participation Consortium
- Welsh Assembly Group, Participation Unit
- New Zealand's Ministry of Youth Development's (MYD) work programme and the positive youth development approach outlined in the Youth Development Strategy Aotearoa (YDSA)
- Government of South Australia, Active8 programme
- Office for Children and Youth, Western Australia

**3.6 What are the barriers that would stop NINFY from being effective?**

- Lack of will at the highest level of Government or resistance from some or all government departments
- Lack of financial and human resources
- NINFY will not have the 'teeth' to positively influence Government, or publicly censure Government when it fails to respond to recommendations etc
- A route map is not developed which will ensure seeds of ideas are grown into real changes for c&yp
- Lack of recognition of the time that is required and perhaps the difficulty in aligning 'business' timeframes with working according to young people's needs



- Availability of a wide range of young people and associated NINFY workload versus other demands on the young people's time.
- NINFY is not representative of all children and young people and sections of society that speak on behalf of children and young people
- Plans are made without working in partnership or awareness of existing strategies, policies, etc, i.e. there is no joint up thinking

#### **4.0 Additional Questions:**

In the development of NINFY, consideration should be given to the following:

- What would the Terms of Reference be for NINFY?
- Young people should sit on any Board / Steering group, etc.
- How would it be constituted?
- How will RPA affect any youth body?
- Is there a role for parents / advocates for 0-3 year olds?
- How would government ensure it is representative?
- Will there be a link between NINFY and the Participation Network?

#### **5.0 Summary**

NICCY welcomes the opportunity to comment at this stage on the development of NINFY and agree that it has the potential to make a real difference in the lives of children and young people.

To get the best possible model for NINFY, NICCY would encourage the working group to seek the immediate involvement of children and young people in planning, development and implementation phases of the programme, as well as its stated aim of encouraging organisations and young people to respond to the consultation paper when it is published.  
(Consultation plans should include methods of providing feedback to those organisations and young people who take part)

NICCY also recommend that the Department undertake full Children's Rights Impact Assessment on each of the options passed on to them from the working group.

It is recommended that NINFY produce a Communication Plan to ensure the development of this service is given the profile required and information is open and transparent.

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