

Our Policy Calls to Action

Northern Ireland has the youngest population in the United Kingdom. Twenty-seven percent (27%) of those who live here are 25 years old or younger.

Children and young people represent the best point of investment for achieving better outcomes for Northern Ireland.

Children and young people must be accorded greater priority and made more visible in all levels of government policy and planning. There are two mechanisms that can help achieve this:

- A Statutory Duty to Co-operate among Government Departments
- Children's Budgeting

We believe that these two mechanisms will help ensure more effective and better coordinated policies and spending intended to improve the lives of children and young people in Northern Ireland.





Our Calls to Action

We are seeking the support and partnership of political parties, elected members of the Northern Ireland Assembly and leaders in public policy development and implementation to endorse and work toward the achievement of these policy objectives.

Statutory Duty to Co-operate

A Statutory Duty to Co-operate places a legal obligation on Government Departments, authorities, agencies, public bodies, district councils and other relevant persons to work together in the planning, commissioning and delivery of children's services.

A Statutory Duty to Co-operate would ensure the best outcomes for children and young people are achieved.

Children's Budgeting

Children's Budgeting is the process of examining the resources that are allocated to policies and services that affect children and young people, assessing the impact they have, and looking at whether these adequately reflect the needs of children and young people.

Children's budgeting would ensure that money is spent strategically towards promoting the well-being of children and young people.

Connecting Policy to Outcomes

The benefits to investing early in a child's life are well-documented and endure for a lifetime. These include not only higher levels of achievement in school and greater productivity as adults, but also higher levels of social and emotional functioning and more positive engagement with society.

The timeline of a child's life means that occasions for intervention are short and the consequences of absent, poorly coordinated or inadequate policies can be significant.

Missed Opportunities

In recent years in Northern Ireland, critical chances for better outcomes for children and young people have been missed as key strategies have been insufficiently developed, implemented or integrated across government, or have failed to adhere to obligations outlined in fundamental statutes and regulations.¹

¹ These include Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act, the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and targets set by the Child Poverty Act 2010.



Policy Disconnect at a Local Level

So much more could be achieved if there were greater levels of awareness in how policy design and implementation are working across government departments, and if there were a clearer sense of how and where money is being spent.

The case studies below provide a picture of what can happen when policy fails to connect with the realities of children and young people's lives, the consequences and the financial implications when government's response is insufficiently co-ordinated.

CASE STUDY

Youth Justice

There are a disproportionate number of children in Woodlands JJC from a care background. Recent figures reveal that over one third of total admissions to the JJC are looked after children. Of the 301 total initial admissions, 56% of those were under PACE (Police and Criminal Evidence Order 1989) and 35% under remand; 19% of which were subject to a care order with a further 13% being voluntarily accommodated in the care system.² Given that looked after children account for approximately 0.4% of the total population of children under 16 in Northern Ireland, this statistic reveals a disproportionate use of custody and in particular the use of PACE and remand on these children.³

WHAT YOUNG PEOPLE SAY ABOUT HOW THIS IS AFFECTING THEM:

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“I’ve been in care since I was 6 years old; no-one really knows what I’ve been through.”

“Because things happen, like a close family member dies, ‘cos then you get in bad form and mix with a bad crowd and then you get into crime. Like, when I went into a care home, it was the people I mixed with. I wouldn’t have done crime before I went into a care home.”

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² http://www.youthjusticeagencyni.gov.uk/document_uploads/SB_4_2012_-_YJA_Provisional_Workload_Statistics_April-December2012.pdf

³ Department of Justice, 2011, A Review of the Youth Justice System in NI, p7.



Policy Disconnect at a Local Level

CASE STUDY

Children with Disabilities

There is regional disparity between board areas in the attainment of deaf children in Northern Ireland. The NEELB provides an audiology van service and employs more Teachers of the Deaf than the other Board areas ⁴. Over the past three years the NEELB has seen a major increase in the attainment of deaf children within its area.

During the period 03/04 to 05/06 the number of deaf children achieving 5 GCSEs A*-C in the NEELB was 37.5% by the period 09/10 to 10/11 this figure had increased to 68.2%. This highlights the importance of getting educational supports for deaf children right.

Unfortunately not every Board area has experienced the same trend. The figures show a considerable gap between the highest achieving Board areas and the lowest. Over the period 09/10 to 10/11 there was a gap of 22.4% between the highest and lowest achieving board areas. ⁵

WHAT YOUNG PEOPLE SAY:

“I never had a support teacher, some friends helped but one to one support would have helped.. I would have liked a tutor for English and Maths, but didn't get it.”

“I know a lot of parents who just don't go back to work because they can't find anyone to look after their child. Someone who has the right skills. Children who are deaf are often forgotten about, we don't get the same service as everyone else. (Parent of a child who is deaf).”

⁴ AQW 2968/11-15

⁵ AQW 12738/11-15



Connecting Policy to Outcomes

CASE STUDY ONE

Youth Justice

Introducing a Statutory Duty to Co-operate would help advance delivery of early intervention and diversionary services across Government Departments, preventing distress in the lives of looked after children and reducing the amount of public funds spent in more expensive crisis situations.

CASE STUDY TWO

Children with Disabilities

Introducing Children's Budgeting would help deliver improved services and address obstacles faced by children with disabilities, policy decisions would be child-centred and address the current substantial variations in demographic levels of service provision.

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