

UN Convention on the Rights of the Child



WHAT YOU SAY MATTERS *Young People Using Rights for Change*



Belfast City Hall
27 October 2016



Youth Conference Report

December 2016

*Young People's Views and Questions for
Government from Youth Engagement Event
in City Hall on 27 October 2016*

Introduction

On the 27 October 2016, 90 young people from schools and youth groups participated in the *'What You Say Matters - Young People Using Rights for Change'* youth engagement event in Belfast City Hall. This event was organised and facilitated by a group of young people from youth@clc, the NI Youth Forum and Belfast City Youth Forum.

During the event, workshop discussions between young people focussed on the UN Committee Recommendations relevant to the four key themes prioritised by young people in *'Our Lives in Our Words' - NI Young People's Report (June 2015)*, which informed the UK UNCRC examination process 2015 – 2016. The four key themes of *'Our Lives in Our Words'* are:

- Participation (Art 12; UNCRC)
- Experience of community life and leisure free from discrimination (Art 2; UNCRC)
- Knowledge of rights (Art 42; UNCRC)
- Mental Health (Art 24; UNCRC)

This report provides a summary of the views expressed by young people during the workshop discussions and key questions identified by young people for the Question and Answer panel discussion with decision makers.

The Conference aimed to:

- Increase young people's awareness of rights under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and specifically the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child's 2016 Concluding Observations and Recommendations to the UK Government on action needed to improve law and policy affecting children's lives in Northern Ireland
- Give young people the opportunity to respond to the UN Committee's Recommendations to Government on change needed to ensure all children can enjoy all their rights in Northern Ireland
- Enable young people to engage in a Question and Answer panel discussion with key decision makers on issues of most concern to them

The Question and Answer panel members were:

| | |
|-----------------------|---|
| Mr Andrew Dawson | Head of Mental Health Policy and Capacity Unit, Department of Health (deputising for the Minister for Health) |
| Mr Barry McElduff MLA | Chairperson; Committee for Education |
| ACC Mr Steven Martin | Assistant Chief Constable and Youth Champion; PSNI |

On behalf of youth@clc, NIYF and Belfast Youth Forum, a huge thanks to all the young people who participated in the “What You Say Matters” youth engagement event in City Hall on 27 October 2016.

Following on from this event, in early 2017 representatives from youth@clc, NIYF and Belfast Youth Forum will be engaging further with key decision makers on many of the key concerns identified by young people at City Hall.

If you would like more information on our ongoing youth participation work and/or you know of any young people who would like to get more involved, please contact either the Children’s Law Centre, the NIYF or Belfast City Youth Forum for further information:

Youth Participation and Advocacy Project
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The following provides a summary of the views expressed by young people during the workshop discussions and key questions identified by young people for the Question and Answer panel discussion with decision makers.

Participation – Art 12 UNCRC

Views expressed by young people in the workshops:

“Every school year should have a school council! If they cared they would listen to young people...”

“Schools Councils are a photo opportunity...no substance to them and are tokenistic...”

“Pupils are not consulted on what to use funding on.”

“Schools Councils ‘say’ that they do things but there’s no evidence of this for everyone to see.”

“A lot of young people think that the Government doesn’t care about them or their views, we can’t vote, are not taken seriously, have no platform for a voice and adults don’t want to talk to children and young people.”

“UKYP (United Kingdom Youth Parliament) should be given a formalised role on promoting rights.”

“There are limited youth groups in areas...lack of facilities can lead to underage drinking...no services...”

Questions for Government:

“Why are under 18s denied the right to vote? It should be lowered to 16?”

“Why is Government afraid of young people’s views?”

“How are young people involved in decision making i.e. if there is no youth parliament?”

“Government should ask children and young people opinions on issues that affect them e.g. surveys?”

“Why are young people not informed or asked about important issues?”

Community Life – Art 2, 15 and 31 UNCRC

Views expressed by young people in the workshops:

“Youth facilities NOT VISIBLE ENOUGH”

“Ask young people what is needed in each area”

“Improve transport in rural areas”

“Poor transport services impacts on socialising”

“Young people are afraid of paramilitaries/conflict”

“Why do a lot of young people be stopped and searched?”

Questions for Government:

“Why are funds being cut to the youth & community sector?”

“Why does the proposed goods, facilities and services legislation discriminate against U16s?”

“Would you say that the rural or city places are underfunded and need more work?”

“When young people are stopped and searched and they say ‘no’, why is it assumed that you are doing something wrong?”

“On what grounds can police move someone on? Why young people and not adults for this? Is this fair and equitable?”

“How can transport links be improved for young people?”

“What are you going to do about paramilitary groups?”

Knowing your Rights – Art 42 UNCRC

Views expressed by young people in the workshops:

“teachers should be trained on the UNCRC.”

“...no one in our group has heard of the UNCRC...”

“All of the people in this group agree that we should be taught more about our rights!”

“Children and young people need more rights and these should be absolutely taught in school.”

Questions for Government:

“Would you make learning the UNCRC a subject at least once a week at first year?”

“Why are young people’s rights not taught to everyone?”

“Why is learning about our rights not mandatory?”

“How are you going to educate older people on rights?”

Mental Health – Art 24 UNCRC

Views expressed by young people in the workshops:

“Mental health is the biggest issue in NI for young people...
ruining families...causing death...”

“There needs to be more mental health facilities for young
people and diagnosis takes too long...”

“...waiting lists are too long...lot of stigmatism...not talked
about in schools”

“...more proactive discussion is needed...need a societal
shift...focus more on early intervention...”

“Mental health needs to be more visible...not taboo...”

“Include mental health in curriculum for primary schools...not
enough support in schools...”

“There is pressure in school life – we are not being taught
more about life”

“Older people’s attitudes are like ‘just deal with your
issues’”

“More support needed for young people.”

“...there’s a need for preventive services – young people
shouldn’t have to find them – they should just be there”

“Young people have doubts about counselling
confidentially”

Questions for Government:

“Why is child and adolescent mental health not being looked at as probably the biggest issue in Northern Ireland as it causing the most deaths in young people?”

“Can you focus more on early intervention, whether for learning disabilities or child and adolescent mental health?”

“Why is there not enough funding going into child and adolescent mental health?”

“What are your immediate plans for child and adolescent mental health i.e. for the next 2 years?”

“Why are there not enough child and adolescent mental health hospitals for young people?”

“Could child and adolescent mental health not be included in the curriculum from primary school age e.g. P3 and upwards?”

“When are you going to cut down waiting times for young people?”

“Why are patients denied proper medical help due to their age?”

“Why is physical health more prominent than child and adolescent mental health?”

Additional Concerns Expressed by Young People

- **Impact of Brexit on children and young people**
- **Age discrimination in provision of medical services**
- **Education cuts**
- **Lack of special needs teachers**
- **Lack of education on sexual health and sexuality**
- **Need for separate facilities for ‘trans’ young people**
- **Waiting lists for autism services**
- **Lack of dyslexia support in schools**
- **More support for children with disabilities in schools**
- **Section 75 should apply to schools**
- **More funding for the Irish language**
- **More investment in young people**

Young People’s Proposals for Moving Forward on Rights

- ✓ **More direct engagement with MLAs/Government Departments on key issues**
- ✓ **More debates, conferences and events involving MLAs, decision makers, young people and “inspirational speakers”**
- ✓ **Produce Event Reports as evidence of need for Action on Rights**
- ✓ **Online campaigns and petitions**
- ✓ **More surveys on young people’s views**
- ✓ **Auditorium Café for young people**
- ✓ **More Young people should join Youth Forums**