Children and Young People's Strategy
2017-2027

Consultation Response Report

30 March 2018

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Executive Summary

Background

The draft Children and Young People's Strategy (the Strategy) was created through a 'co-design' process with a wide group of stakeholders. The draft Strategy was approved by the Northern Ireland (NI) Executive on 14 December 2016 and launched for public consultation on 19 December. The consultation lasted for 14 weeks and concluded on 31 March 2017.

The consultation process

The Children's Services Co-operation Act (Northern Ireland) 2015[1] (CSCA) places a duty on the NI Executive to adopt a Children and Young People's Strategy setting out how it proposes to improve the well-being of children and young people. The Act states that before adopting the Strategy, the Executive must consult[2]:

a) Children and young people;
b) Parents and guardians of children and young people;
c) Those who represent the views and interests of children and young people as the Executive believe appropriate; and
d) Any other individuals who the Executive believe are appropriate.

To ensure that these requirements were satisfied, and a thorough consultation carried out, the following actions were taken:

- The consultation documentation was placed on the Department of Education (DE) website with an accompanying questionnaire for stakeholders to complete, either via hard copy or online;
- A children and young people's version of the Strategy, and an accompanying questionnaire, was prepared and widely distributed;
- DE facilitated meetings with various key stakeholder groups;
- Seven public consultation meetings were held by DE. These took place in Ballymena, Belfast, Craigavon, Enniskillen, Londonderry/Derry, Newry and Omagh;
- Parenting NI was commissioned to engage with parents/guardians. This was done through a series of focus groups and one to one interviews with a total of 48 parents. Parenting NI completing a report on the issues discussed and views expressed. The report is attached at **Appendix I**; and
- Participation Network, in partnership with Youth Action NI, carried out a series of events and focus groups with more than 100 children and young people to gather their views on the Strategy and the key issues they face on a daily basis. Officials from DE attended some of these events to hear the views of children and young people first hand. An overview of the issues raised is attached at **Appendix II.**

Over 500 stakeholders, parents/guardians and children and young people participated in the various events facilitated by DE, Parenting NI and Participation Network.

[1] http://www.legislation.gov.uk/nia/2015/10/contents
[2] Children's Services Co-operation Act (Northern Ireland) 2015, Section 3 (4)

In total, 260 responses were received to the consultation via completed questionnaires (including the children and young people's version) and narrative responses.

Approach to analysis

DE has worked with colleagues from the Analytical Services Unit (NISRA) to prepare this report. DE has also been supported by the Assembly Research and Information Service (RaISe) to consider the qualitative responses to the survey. Finally, the Centre for Effective Services (CES) has played a key role in supporting the development of a consistent framework for gathering views and analysing responses. CES also contributed significantly to the preparation of this report.

Given the various forms of response (questionnaires, narrative responses, children and young people's surveys, focus group comments etc.) DE worked with CES to establish an analysis framework to gather and categorise comments received. Initial analysis revealed that responses to the consultation were overwhelmingly positive, with very high levels of support for the vast majority of proposals. However, while respondents frequently provided positive responses, they also raised important points within the text boxes provided. For this reason it was decided that a simple analysis of the qualitative responses would not provide a comprehensive picture of stakeholder views.

Instead, the comments provided by respondents were considered and allocated to one of five categories. These were:

- General comments which **support** the content of the draft Strategy document;
- Issues in the draft Strategy which respondents felt needed further **expansion or clarification** in the final document;
- **Problems or gaps** identified by respondents which they felt could hinder the delivery of the Strategy;
- Suggested **actions** which could be considered to support the delivery of the Strategy; and
- Examples of **suggested best practice**, including existing services, research or partners, which should be considered to support implementation of the Strategy.

This approach has helped to define the nature of respondents' comments and to identify recurring themes within each outcome.

In addition to assessing the comments received from stakeholders in general, the report highlights the views expressed on each issue by parents/guardians, and children and young people (including feedback received through questionnaires and consultation events).

The Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People (NICCY) has a duty[3] to promote an understanding of the rights of children and young people, promote an awareness of the importance of those rights, and promote an awareness of matters relating to the best interests of children and young people. NICCY's role is 'to safeguard and promote the rights and best interests of children and young people'. NICCY advises the NI Executive on matters

[3] The Commissioner for Children and Young People (Northern Ireland) Order 2003 s7 (1)

concerning the rights or best interests of children and young people[4]. Given the role and responsibilities of the Commissioner, this report also outlines the views expressed by NICCY on each of the key areas within the draft Strategy.

Reading this document

This report presents a detailed account of the responses received and views expressed during the public consultation on the draft Strategy. The comments set out within the report represent the views of the stakeholders who expressed them. As such, they do not, on every occasion, reflect the views or policies of Executive Departments.

Each chapter in the report has a similar structure and outlines the following:

- **What the draft Strategy proposed** – This briefly describes what was proposed in the draft Strategy in relation to the Aims, Principles, Structure, and each of the eight desired Strategic outcomes;
- **The advice of NICCY** – This provides a narrative of the views expressed by NICCY in response to the consultation document; and
- **A summary of the key outcome for each area** along with what were proposed as the **areas of greatest effort,** and the **draft headline indicators**. The comments have been separated to show the different responses from stakeholders, children and young people and parents and guardians.
- **What are the main issues to be addressed** summarises and highlights the key points that need to be considered during implementation.

Each chapter also provides a brief quantitative analysis of the level of support for the proposals contained in the draft Strategy on a simple bar chart. This quantitative analysis is based only on the direct responses to the questions posed within the consultation document, captured via the online questionnaire and Survey Monkey. For each chart a number is provided of the responses to the question ("*n*=").

This is followed by a series of tables which summarise respondents' qualitative comments under the five categories described previously. Responses to some proposals may not fall into every one of the five categories, therefore only those which are relevant are included under each issue. Each chapter also provides an overview of the additional comments provided.

The report will inform the preparation of the final Strategy document and accompanying implementation plan.

[4] The Commissioner for Children and Young People (Northern Ireland) Order 2003 s4

The recurring themes

A range of themes recurred throughout the consultation responses. These are outlined below.

Strategy Design and Planning

i. Requirement to establish clear links between the outcomes and indicators and to consider further indicators for areas of greatest effort to ensure measurement is as meaningful as possible. The inclusion of clear actions related to each outcome was proposed as useful in supporting the realisation of each outcome.

ii. Importance of taking relevant international and domestic legislation into account in the planning and delivery of the Strategy. Reference was made to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), Concluding Observations, United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (UNCRPD), CSCA, Disability Discrimination Act and a range of other legal frameworks and policies.

iii. Ongoing engagement with all stakeholders, including those working in statutory and community and voluntary sectors and children and young people throughout the lifetime of the Strategy, was regarded as essential.

Strategy Delivery

iv. Effective co-operation, collaborative working and information sharing between all stakeholders, including Government departments and agencies, was regarded as key to the successful implementation of the Strategy. Reference also made to the important role which community planning has in supporting delivery of the Strategy.

v. Establishment of appropriate management and delivery structures was considered key to the effective implementation of the Strategy.

vi. Recognition that specific groups of children and young people require greater attention or specific types of intervention across all eight outcomes. These included many of those identified within the Strategy as requiring the greatest effort e.g. looked after children, children and young people with a disability, children and young people in poverty, children and young people with special educational needs (SEN) etc. Transition stages in children and young people's lives and access to services were also considered an important focus.

vii. Early intervention and prevention was identified as a critical principle which should underpin the Strategy, and there were calls for greater investment in these approaches to tackle all issues affecting children and young people.

viii. Establishing and recognising links or 'overlap' with other relevant Strategies was recognised as important, including Programme for Government (PfG), the Child Poverty Strategy, and the draft Strategy for looked after children.

Strategy Evaluation

ix. Sourcing and collating robust, relevant and useful data was recognised as vital in supporting the ongoing monitoring and evaluation of the impact of Strategy. The need to create a comprehensive data development agenda was also identified, as well as the need to take account of existing good practice.

x. Creation of an effective evidence base, incorporating quantitative and qualitative research and data from government departments, community and voluntary organisations and academia was regarded as vital in supporting both the delivery and evaluation of the Strategy.

Aim of the Strategy

What was proposed?

The aim of the draft Strategy was explained as:

"Working together to improve the well-being of children and young people living in Northern Ireland, delivering positive, long-lasting outcomes."

The advice of the Children's Commissioner (NICCY)

Key points made by NICCY in response to consultation are as follows:

There are three important drivers for the Strategy:

1. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and the Concluding Observations on the fifth periodic report (2016);
2. The Children's Services Co-operation Act 2015 (CSCA); and
3. The Programme for Government (PFG) (in draft at time of consultation).

General Comment 5[5] from the Committee on the Rights of the Child should be considered in the preparation of the final Strategy as it provides useful information on the mechanisms governments should employ to implement their obligations under the Convention, and provides considerable detail on what the 'national strategies' should include.

The Strategy should be regarded as the 'road map' which outlines how Government will make a real difference to children's lives, and should take cognisance of the 2016 Concluding Observations from the UN Committee which assess how effectively a state is implementing the UNCRC.

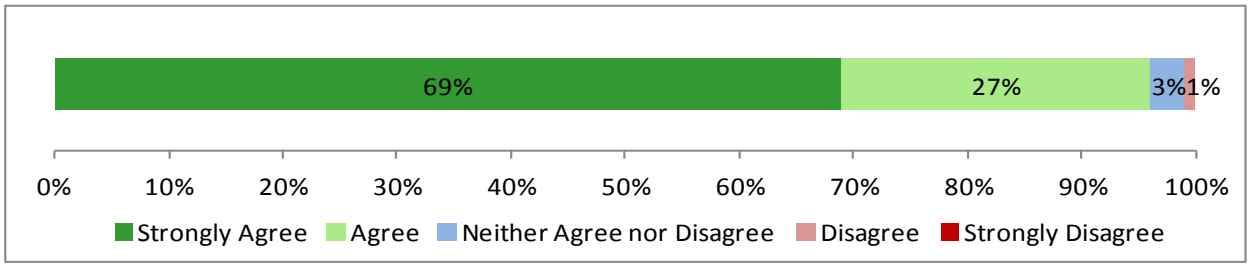
The draft Strategy reflects the legislative requirements of the CSCA. It could be improved by interpreting the well-being outcomes in cognisance of the relevant provisions of the UNCRC.

NICCY is pleased that one of the outcomes within the draft PfG focuses specifically on children and young people, but disappointed with the lack of reference in the draft PfG to the Strategy.

'*The ultimate goal for Government Departments and Agencies in the delivery of children's services should be to improve the well-being of children and young people in a manner which ensures the realisation of their rights.'*

[5] CRC/GC/2003/5

What did stakeholders say about the aim of the Strategy?



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Category of Response	Summary Themes
Support	• *'The aim is one that is much needed for children, particularly those who are more at risk of harm, such as those with a disability.'* • *'Improving the wellbeing of all children should be the aim of all agencies. Unfortunately this is not my experience as a parent of a child with autism'.* • Respondents welcomed the commitment to partnership; the concept of wellbeing; the Strategy's aim to address commitments in the draft PfG and CSCA; and the use of the Outcomes-based Accountability (OBA) approach and its focus on outcomes and impact.
Further expansion/ clarification	• One respondent commented that the wording was *'vague and unfocused'* and should be rephrased to reflect the underpinning values and intentions. • Query regarding the absence of the recognition of parents' role as legal decision-makers and advocates for their children. • Proposal that 'improve' should be replaced with 'ensure'. • Suggestion that the aim should read '*to improve the rights and well-being of all children and young people'*. • The UNCRC and UNCRPD *'should be headlined...within the aim'.*
Action	• Recommendation that the final Strategy include a clear timetabled commitment to tackle inequalities, ensure greater harmonisation and consistency across all Section 75 equality groups. • Requirement for commitment to *'vertical'* collaboration with local Government through community planning activities, not just *'lateral collaboration between Executive departments'.* • One respondent noted that '*Changes are required in the mindset of Government and society – in governance and accountability processes, budget allocations, management and reporting; outcomes measurement and reporting methods and in many cases, legislation.'* • Proposed that the UNCRC (and in some cases also the UNCRPD) should underpin the entire Strategy: *'The Strategy must represent the national strategy for the implementation of the UNCRC in Northern Ireland…currently there are only limited references to children's rights.'*

Category of Response	Summary Themes
	• The aim should be translated throughout the Strategy: '*It should be reflected within the values, operational principles, key action areas; strategic outcomes and associated indicators.'* • Importance of 'joined up thinking', 'joined up working' and 'a multi-agency approach' if the Strategy is to be a success. • *'Effective partnership working [is] critical to achieving outcomes.'* • Need to establish clear connections between the Strategy, the Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership (CYPSP) and the PfG.

What did children and young people say?

The young people's version of the consultation document focused on the 8 population level outcomes, actions and indicators. It did not specifically ask for comments on the aim of the Strategy and therefore no specific comments have been noted from children and young people on this issue.

What did parents/guardians say?

Similarly, specific consultation with parents/guardians focused on the 8 population level outcomes, actions and indicators, and did not specifically ask for comments on the aim of the Strategy. No specific comments have been noted from parents/guardians on this issue.

Key points

Key points raised with regard to the aim of the draft Strategy are set out below:

- The **Strategy is the 'national strategy'** and therefore the content of **General Comment 5 is relevant** to the preparation of the final Strategy.
- **Partnership is vital**. There are many key agents involved in delivering better outcomes for children and young people including Government and parents/guardians.
- **Consistent and sustained actions are required**, with specific timescales and measurable outcomes.
- There is a need to:
  - consider the prominence of the **UNCRC, the UNCRPD, and the 2016 Concluding Observations**
  - consider the **use of 'rights'** specifically within the aim of the Strategy
  - ensure the Strategy is **compliant with the CSCA**
  - highlight the **relationship between the PfG and the Strategy**, and
  - recognise that whilst the aim of the Strategy is universal, **some children and young people face greater barriers to well-being** and positive outcomes than others.

Key Principles

What was proposed?

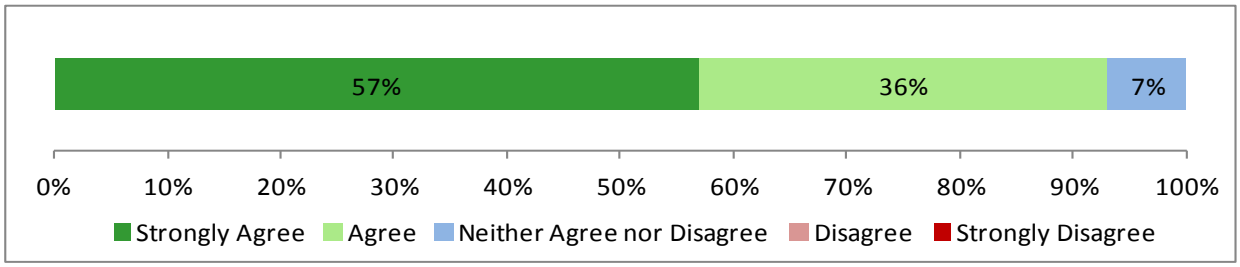
The draft consultation document outlined eight key principles that, it proposed, would guide the development and delivery of the Strategy:

Participation	***Focused on early intervention***
Partnership	***Age appropriate actions***
Co-Design	***Rights based***
Evidence Informed	***Subject to review***

The advice of the Children's Commissioner

No additional comments were noted from NICCY on this issue.

What did stakeholders say about the key principles?



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Category of Response	Summary Themes
Support	• Participation, as a fundamental part of citizenship, was highlighted as being essential for the effective delivery of the Strategy, helping to ensure that children and young people have the opportunity to inform/influence decisions and make positive changes to policies, programmes and services which could, in turn, support implementation and delivery. • Co-operation, collaboration and the sharing of information were also highlighted as being key to ensuring the success of the Strategy, as was the importance of key partners and stakeholders working together to ensure the rights of children and young people are recognised and respected. • Use of OBA was perceived as positive – will help to ensure a close alignment with other relevant Strategies and policy frameworks. • Linkage with the PfG and new Community Plans was also specifically referenced.

Category of Response	Summary Themes
	• Important that older young people (18-24 yrs) receive the support they need - especially true given the challenges young people can face when transitioning from children's services to adult services.
Further expansion/ clarification	• Consider additional principles including: Equality; Accountability; Transparency, and Family Focused. • Concept of 'early intervention' requires further definition to make clear it includes 'early years' and 'early stage' intervention. • Need more detail on Strategy reviews – how reviews will be implemented, frequency, and the anticipated outworkings of such reviews. • Annual reports regarded as helpful, supported by full review and evaluation every three years. • Ongoing and informal engagement would assist review. • Important to establish a central information system that could be accessed by Departments and stakeholders to support monitoring and scrutiny of progress against indicators. This will help to achieve transparency and ensure that actions are revised according to need. The system could also act as a repository for research, information and data from academia and the community and voluntary sector (CVS). • Indicators should not be associated with a single outcome, but rather regarded as cross-cutting and relevant to a number of outcomes. • On occasion, the areas of greatest effort are not supported by a specific indicator. • Query use of measurements at population level only - suggest that a breakdown by location or social groups may be required.
Problems/ gaps	• Important to define 'early intervention' - make clear that it means early stage intervention both in terms of age and identification of problem. • Continued engagement with children and young people at other developmental stages, and ensuring emerging problems are identified and support provided, is important. • Resource/cost implications of implementing the Strategy need to be considered – consider a breakdown of the budget for each outcome.
Action	• Consider concept of effective partnership working. Partnership and collaboration between Government, the CVS, children and young people and their families was regarded as central to the successful delivery of the Strategy. • Important to link the Strategy with the community planning process – community plans could be a key element for delivery. • Families and schools require support to influence positive outcomes.
Suggested best practice	• Stakeholders highlighted the importance of drawing on a range of expertise across Government, statutory, non-statutory and voluntary sectors as well as academia. One stakeholder said that it is imperative that this expertise is accessed through a joined-up policy agenda, promoting a framework of

Category of Response	Summary Themes
	a whole child approach. The use of data and evidence to inform decisions was regarded as essential.

What did children and young people say?

The young people's version of the consultation document focused on the 8 population level outcomes, actions and indicators. It did not specifically ask for comments on the key principles of the Strategy.

What did parents/guardians say?

Parents/guardians who took part in the consultation commented that the Strategy, and others which are similar, need to approach problems from the *'grass roots'* and *'work from the bottom up'*, rather than taking a top down approach. Some said that many strategies are not implemented properly, and community support representation is important.

Key Points

Key points raised with regard to the Strategy's key principles include:

- **Participation** is critical to the success of the Strategy. Active engagement with stakeholders, children and young people and parents/guardians is required.
- **Additional principles** including Equality; Accountability; Transparency, and Family Focused should be considered.
- **Co-operation and collaboration** are regarded as essential and, linked to this, the need for more effective information sharing.
- The **OBA model** is regarded as a positive evaluation tool.
- Need **clear alignment and linkage** with the PfG and the Community Planning process.
- The concept of **'early intervention'** requires further definition to make clear it includes 'early years' and 'early stage' intervention.
- **Best practice and research** should be gathered from across Government, its agencies, the CVS and academia.
- Strategy **needs to be 'alive' to new issues**. Need regular updates, reviews and evaluations.
- **Transparent data collection** would be helpful in monitoring progress, alongside the availability of a central information source online.
- Strategy should detail which **outcomes and indicators** are interlinked and cross-cutting.
- **Budgets should be linked to the outcomes**, or an effort made to detail how much money is being spent on children's services across the different outcome areas.
- Implementation will **require the support of the CVS, community groups, children and young people and their families**.

New Structures

What was proposed?

The consultation document proposed the establishment of new structures, and use of existing structures, to oversee the delivery of the Strategy. These structures were as follows:

- ***Ministerial led Sub-Committee for Children and Young People;***
- ***Children and Young People's Strategy Group;***
- ***Stakeholder forum;***
- ***Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership (CYPSP);***
- ***Ongoing engagement with children and young people;***
- ***Ongoing engagement with parents and guardians; and***
- ***Accessing relevant research from academia.***

The advice of the Children's Commissioner

Key points made by NICCY in response to consultation are as follows:

Pleased to see that the Executive intends to work closely with a range of stakeholders in implementing the Strategy, including children and young people, and their parents/carers.

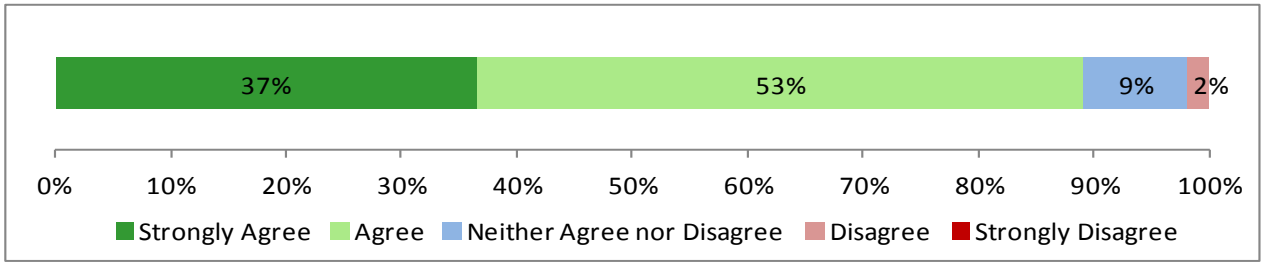
The proposal for a Ministerial Committee to oversee the implementation of the Strategy is positive.

It is vital that the new structures are set up in a timely manner and that regular meetings are scheduled throughout the lifetime of the Strategy.

NICCY expects to engage at every level of the new structures in order to fulfil the statutory duties of the Office.

Clear mechanisms for engaging with and obtaining the views of all stakeholders, particularly ongoing engagement with children and young people, are essential.

What did stakeholders say?



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Category of Response	Summary Themes
Further expansion/ clarification	In relation to the **proposed structures:** • Concerns raised about the Ministerial led Sub Committee's potential effectiveness and lines of accountability (short and long term). More information requested regarding its membership. • Greater clarity required regarding accountability and the membership of the Strategy Group. • More detail required as to how children and young people's views will actually impact on decision making, and how meaningful engagement between children and young people and the NI Executive will be supported. • CYPSP requires a more central role, possibly on the Ministerial led Sub-committee. • Clarity required as to how parents could potentially influence policy. • More information needed about the implementation of the structures, including reporting mechanisms and the potential for structures to be both *'top down and bottom up'.*
Problems/ gaps	• Consider making particular provision for children with disabilities; looked after children; younger children; and children living in rural areas or areas of social deprivation within the structures.
Action	In relation to the **proposed structures:** • All Ministers, Permanent Secretaries of Executive Departments, and CEOs of relevant bodies need to commit to the Strategy and provide appropriate resources. • The Sub-Committee has the potential to tackle child health inequalities; recommend the full implementation of the Paediatric Healthcare Services Strategy; and establish a Regional Paediatric Network. • Potential effectiveness of the stakeholder forum recognised - suggest the forum has the necessary membership and mandate, and meets regularly to ensure current issues are being addressed. • Need to take account of existing fora for children and young people and consider how such fora could be integrated into any new structures. • Consider how digital technology could be used to promote engagement with children and young people (particularly those who are marginalised or seldom heard) and their parents. • Important to develop a clear research agenda to include academic, practice-based and expert evidence and more collaborative research partnerships across academic and practice settings. • Consider 'an overarching reference to the OBA/PfG approach'. • Need 'co-operation across organisational boundaries' to ensure improved outcomes for children and young people. • Ensure research and datasets are shared within and across Government departments to assist in developing an evidence base.

Category of Response	Summary Themes
	In relation to the **implementation of the proposed structures**: • *'Collaborative working or cross-departmental working'* is important. Improvements can be made through joint policy development and communication. • Need to strengthen links between CAMHS and education services. • In reference to shared budgets, need to consider accountability and the establishment of lead roles, reporting lines, authorising structures and responsibilities. • Need effective and genuine engagement between children and young people and Departments. • Engagement and delivery at a local level is necessary to ensure the success of the Strategy. • Local strategic partnerships between agencies important - to enable good decision making. Also need open, transparent mechanisms to ensure accountability. • Structures should be timely, involve regular meetings and establish appropriate accountability and review mechanisms. • Suggest an evaluation of the Children's Champions[6] network. • Important to consider the linkages with community planning. • Consider a role for other identified agencies or groups in the delivery of the Strategy. • Propose the establishment of additional groups to advise or support the Strategy's implementation. • Important to integrate existing structures and ensure all relevant stakeholders *('those involved in scrutiny, delivery, reporting and research'*) are involved. • CVS organisations have a significant role – consider need for meaningful collaboration with the CVS and enabling CVS organisations to contribute to the development and delivery of the Strategy. • Important to access quality research and practitioner expertise developed in the CVS to enhance the process; help to develop and measure meaningful indicators; and provide CVS with opportunities to input to the research agenda. • Need representation from '*all education sectors'*. • Propose involvement of councils, clinicians, trade unions, public health professionals and the Public Health Authority (PHA) Child Development Project Board. • Consider the establishment of an expert advisory group to explore adversity, equality and human rights; a committee to reflect the contribution

[6] The Children's Champions network is comprised of senior officials who act as the senior point of contact for all issues relating to children and young people for their Department. Each Government Department has a nominated Children's Champion.

Category of Response	Summary Themes
	of the CVS; and a disability steering group in each Government department to link with CYPSP and provide advice on Government delivery plans.
Suggested best practice	• Examples of relevant and useful research, expertise and good practice have been provided which could be harnessed to support the development of structures. • Suggest that the Strategy draws upon academics' expertise in establishing and evaluating interventions associated with the Strategy; and utilises CVS research and expertise.

What did children and young people say?

The children and young people who participated in the consultation were given four potential options as to how they could perhaps be engaged with the implementation and review of the Strategy. The options were:

1. To set up a panel of children and young people to meet 2 or 3 times a year to discuss the Strategy's progress;
2. To establish an online forum where views could be posted;
3. To ask organisations to facilitate joint meetings for Departmental officials to gather views; and
4. To convene an event every year/two years with lots of different young people to review progress on the Strategy and raise issues of concern.

They were also given the opportunity to make their own suggestions.

The establishment of an online forum was the least popular option as young people expressed a desire to be more actively engaged. The option to set up a panel of children and young people was only received positively by a minority - it was felt that the NICCY Youth Panel already fulfils this function. The facilitation of joint meetings, and a regular event attended by lots of children and young people to review progress on the Strategy (which the children and young people suggested should be annual) were more popular options - and it was felt that the two could be used to complement each other. The facilitation of joint meetings was favoured by the majority of children and young people who took part in the consultation.
Children and young people expressed the opinion that the views of young people who are likely to be impacted by specific issues, should be targeted for engagement.

They suggested that an 'app' could be developed to survey young people's opinions about the ongoing delivery of the Strategy.

They also suggested that workshops could take place in schools with people from DE present, and highlighted pupil councils as a potentially useful mechanism to discuss engagement best practice – with representatives from different schools meeting as part of a wider community council that helps to make decisions.

One young person proposed the following approach:

'[It would be good to have] people coming to our school to chat through … ideas with us so we can share our thoughts. It would also be great to be part of a larger group who meet together every-so-often to discuss these ideas so we can meet our peers and come up with ideas that are best for everyone.'

Other comments made in relation to structures were as follows:

'It would be good to have young members of parliament who could represent young people's views.'

'MPs should visit youth centres and schools to hear directly from young people.'

What did parents/guardians say?

Some parents /guardians asked for clarity regarding responsibility and accountability with regards to the implementation of the Strategy.

During discussions, the importance of community 'buy-in' and engagement with parents/guardians was highlighted. The establishment of a specific stakeholder group of parents/guardians to provide ongoing advice on parenting issues was recommended.

Key Points

Key points raised with regard to the structures in place to support the Strategy are as follows:

- Each of the **proposed structures is important.**
- There is a particular need to **ensure the voices of children and young people are heard** throughout the lifetime of the Strategy.
- The proposed **Ministerial led Sub Committee received a mixed response.**
- In general, **greater clarity is needed in relation to each of the different groups** – in terms of their role; regularity with which views would be sought; membership; accountability processes and internal structures.
- Consider whether the creation of new structures **could merely add to existing bureaucracy**, and whether the **utilisation of existing structures or fora** should be considered in the first instance.
- **CYPSP** perceived by some stakeholders as having a key role in service delivery, co-ordination and reporting.
- Recognise the **valuable research contribution made by the CVS**, and consider a mechanism to ensure this research is shared and utilised when Departments develop policies, programmes, or new indicators and measures.
- There are **many different groups or organisations who would wish to play a role** - presenting both opportunities and challenges.
- **Engagement must be both effective and genuine**, with a need for open and honest dialogue across Government and its stakeholders.

- New interventions, resulting from the Strategy, should be developed through a process that includes **co-design**. Need to consider how to alert Departments to the benefits of co-design and to encourage its use.
- The effectiveness of **the Strategy should be subject to evaluation and scrutiny**.
- **Children and young people expressed a desire to be involved** and should to be accommodated appropriately through, for example, focus groups, larger fora, existing fora and online/social media. The **voices of different groups of children and young people with specific issues** were recognised as important.
- Effective implementation of the Strategy requires the **commitment of senior staff** within Departments, agencies and stakeholder organisation (including Ministers, Permanent Secretaries, CEO's etc.) and the **provision of adequate resources**.

Physical and Mental Health

What was proposed?

The outcome proposed was that *all children and young people are physically and mentally healthy.*

The areas of greatest effort identified were:

- ***Infants***
- ***Children and young people with mental health problems***
- ***Children and young people with a disability and/or complex health needs, including life limiting conditions***
- ***Children and young people living in areas of deprivation***

The headline indicators proposed were:

- **Childhood obesity**: Percentage of Primary 1/ Year 8 children who are obese – including breakdown by deprivation quintiles to examine the impact of deprivation.
- **Low birth weight**: Proportion of babies born at a low birth weight.
- **Mental health and emotional well-being**: Percentage of children and young people with GHQ12 scores less than or equal to 4 - signifying a possible mental health problem (GHQ12 is a screening device for identifying minor psychiatric disorders).

The advice of the Children's Commissioner

Key points made by NICCY in response to consultation are as follows:

The health and social care system has a central role in meeting the physical and mental health needs of children and young people - although this requires radical transformation.

It is important that the Strategy implementation plan sets targets which are ambitious and challenging for Government departments - but which are also specific, measureable, achievable, realistic and timely.

Child and adolescent mental health should be given equal priority with physical health by both the Department of Health (DoH) and the NI Executive. The section on health provides greater background/contextual information on issues relating to physical health and disability.

It would be useful if the Strategy could give further consideration to various social determinants of poor physical and mental health that need to be addressed in order to achieve a long term sustained improvement in the health and wellbeing of children and young people.

There are a wide range of sources which provide evidence of the increasing prevalence of poor mental health in children and young people, an example of which was referenced in NICCY's response to DoH's consultation on its *Protect Life 2 Strategy*.[7]

The final indicator set should be informed by the 'Child Rights Indicators' project taken forward by UNESCO for what was then the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister (OFMDFM).

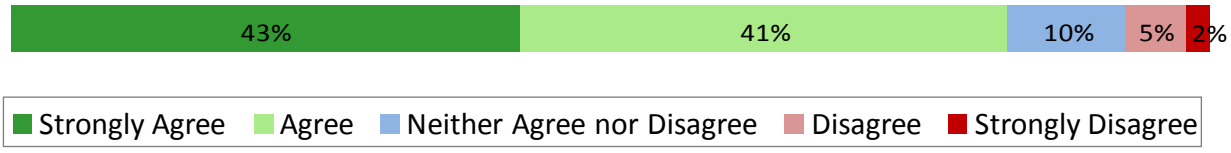
Final indicators should be disaggregated against Section 75 categories, and against key characteristics that place children and young people at greatest risk of poor health and discrimination in terms of accessing health services. A broader suite of indicators should be developed to reflect the areas identified as requiring greatest effort.

A commitment to developing a suitable indicator for the mental health of under 16s as soon as the Strategy becomes 'live' is essential. As a significant focus of the Strategy will be on addressing the underlying root causes of poor health with a focus on prevention and early intervention, the development of an indicator which draws on early signs of poor emotional and mental wellbeing in children and young people is recommended. This could include a self-reported scale of emotional well-being e.g. Young Life and Times (YLT) Kids' Life and Times (KLT) surveys and the Young Persons' Behaviour and Attitudes Survey (YPBAS).

The focus on quality, child appropriate services, and identification of the need for services to be responsive and to work in collaboration to meet the health needs of children and young people is welcome. An indicator on the responsiveness of services or self-reported user satisfaction is recommended.

What did stakeholders say about the areas of greatest effort?

Infants: *By establishing good health habits in the home from an early age the foundations for achieving this outcome will be established.*



n=110

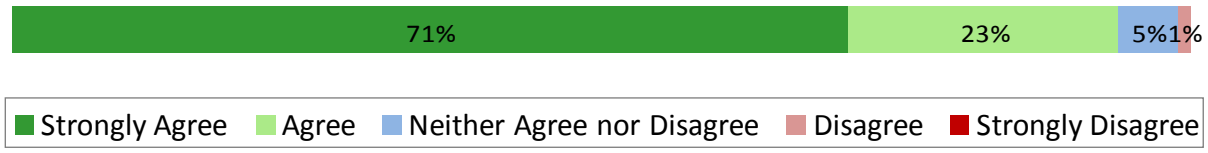
Category of Response	Summary Themes
Support	• Early intervention is key, with issues such as breast feeding, parental smoking and delayed weaning regarded as important. • Teaching 'wellness' – including physical and mental health and emotional well-being habits at an early age considered important. • Parents are key and need the support of health practitioners.

[7] http://www.niccy.org/publications/2016/november/03/department-for-health-s-strategy-protect-life-2/

	• Recognition of the difficulties facing mothers suffering from postnatal depression in responding to their babies' needs, and the potential impact on children's development, is welcome. • Speech, language and communication needs are key to child development. • Positive health habits from an early age will support positive outcomes in other areas.
Further expansion/ clarification	• Important to focus on later development stages, specific issues (e.g. mental health, sexual health) and transitions. • Need to consider environmental and societal factors which impact on health and wellbeing. • Habits in the home need to be reinforced and supported in primary and post primary settings. • Need to focus on accessible services, promotion of health and well-being – ensuring children and young people participate in society and enjoy positive well-being. • Childcare settings have an impact on childhood development and early health habits – therefore it is important to consider the quality of childcare settings and utilise them to promote good behaviours. • Low birth weight recognised as important, but does not account for other issues such as parental physical or mental health.
Problems/gaps	• Potential difficulties arise where parents have limited capacity to model 'good health habits'. Early support is therefore of great importance. • NI has one of the lowest rates of breastfeeding, which impacts on health in early years. • Lack of equitable access to certain services or support e.g. SureStart, 'LifeStart', 'Family Nurse Partnership', Infant Mental Health Service, 'Roots of Empathy'.
Action	• More investment required to support and encourage breastfeeding in NI and to tackle smoking in pregnancy. • Multi-agency approach important – early years settings and schools should have access to a Clinical Psychology Unit. • More public health messages should be delivered in schools - better education on physical and mental health required. • Parents need to be aware of the healthy messages they should promote in the home.
Suggested best practice	• Sure Start model has been very effective where it operates. • The World Health Organisation (WHO) considers breastfeeding to be a key foundation of child health and well-being – there is significant research/evidence in this area. • Belfast City Council delivered an effective programme called Fitter Families.

	• Clinical Psychology could provide training to parents and staff, through programmes such as Solihull and the Incredible Years. • The 'Five to Thrive' framework is effective in supporting healthy child development.

Children and young people with mental health problems: *Concerns relate to depression and anxiety, eating disorders, drug and alcohol related problems and increased levels of self-harm.*



n=108

Category of Response	Summary Themes
Support	• Mental health is a major issue. It can often be ignored, not talked about or left undiagnosed. Need to remove stigma and encourage children and young people to talk about it and seek help. • Children and young people face particular barriers to health and social care including funding for mental health services, access to age appropriate care, and the process of transitioning from youth to adult services. • Children and young people are presenting in schools with broader and more complex needs from pre-school to post 16.
Further expansion/ clarification	• The indicator could be supplemented by measuring the number of requests for support into '*early help networks'* such as Sure Start, Mental Health Hubs or Family Support Hubs. • The 'Boxall Profile' could be used as a measure to assess the mental health and emotional wellbeing of children in schools in order to identify those in need of nurturing interventions. • Need to acknowledge importance of support for parents of children and young people with mental health difficulties. • The continuing impact of the NI conflict should be acknowledged as a factor for mental health prevalence rates. • Need to consider emotional well-being, separate from physical and mental health.
Problems/ gaps	• Significant pressures on services – long waiting lists for support. • Type of support often depends on location (post code lottery). • Stigma of suffering from mental health problems needs to be addressed so children and young people feel comfortable seeking help.

	• Parental mental health also needs to be considered, as it has a major impact on well-being of children and young people.
Actions	• Children and young people and their parents/guardians need to know where they can access information or support. • Need to identify the root causes of mental health problems in children and young people – and tackle these issues. • Schools need to ensure there is a more proactive and preventative pastoral (personal development) curriculum with an emphasis on emotional awareness and resilience. • Schools need support if they are to deal with complex needs of pupils. Nurture groups and a 'whole school approach' could be used – focusing on emotional needs as well as academic learning. • Need for better transitioning support for young people moving from Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) to adult services. • Community plans could consider an integrated approach for mental health support. • Schools or Parent Teacher Associations (PTAs) could run sessions for parents concerned about mental health issues.
Suggested best practice	• The Independent Counselling Service for Schools has been a very successful programme. • Examples of effective resources and programmes in schools include the 'Take 10' app and 'Time4Me'.

Children and young people with a disability and/or complex health needs, including life limiting conditions: *We must ensure that disabilities are not a barrier to the realisation of this or other outcomes for these children and young people*.

n=106

Category of response	Summary themes
Support	• All children and young people should be able to avail of their rights without discrimination. Disability should never pose a barrier to the realisation of any of the outcomes presented in the Strategy. • Important to work to dispel myths about the skills and potential of children and young people with disabilities. • Children with disabilities can often face poorer outcomes in other areas such as play, education, economic well-being etc.
Further expansion/ clarification	• If disability is only be explored under the health outcome, this places it solely within a medical context. The Strategy must recognise the rights of children and young people with disabilities re: health, education, play etc.

	• UNCRC and UNCRPD are key pieces of legislation within the context of the Strategy. • All proposed indicators should be disaggregated to include children with a disability, as well as the other groups relevant to Section 75.
Problems/ gaps	• Research indicates that childcare for children and young people with a disability may be limited, expensive or not appropriate. • Lack of access to suitable play and leisure facilities/activities is a key issue. • Consideration should also be given to the social, emotional and financial support required by families and siblings within families.
Actions	• Ensure the Strategy is clearly linked to the Childcare Strategy and Reducing Economic Inactivity Strategy, especially with regard to the issue of physical and mental health. • Ensure parents have access to information and advice on financial support available to assist them in their role. • Arrangements for, and provision of, respite care should be given greater prominence. • Strengthen collaboration between education and health partners to deliver appropriate provision particularly in specialist educational settings. • Strengthen multi departmental approach to key transition points for children and young people.

Children and young people living in areas of deprivation: *Health outcomes for our children and young people can be significantly affected by where they live, and whether their family experiences poverty.*

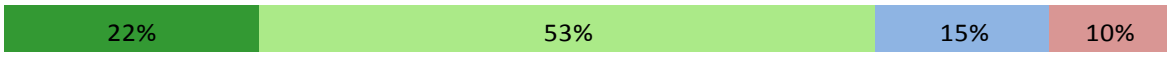
n=106

Category of Response	Summary Themes
Support	• Clear link between health inequalities and health outcomes. 'Place' also has a significant impact on health and well-being: where individuals live, shop, work, learn and play. • Families living with disability often experience financial hardship, placing an additional emotional and mental strain on children and young people. They may then have limited access to paid play and leisure activities, quality childcare or therapies, exacerbating feelings of isolation and exclusion. This may be further compounded by lack of accessible and suitable facilities in rural areas.

Further expansion/ clarification	• Strategy should highlight that many children and young people in poverty live in households where someone is in paid work. • Recommend inclusion of an indicator measuring correlation between the impact of welfare reform cuts and health outcomes.
Problems/ gaps	• Not every child and young person enjoys equal access to a good quality environment – poor quality surroundings can impact negatively on health.
Actions	• The Strategy should set out actions to eliminate healthcare inequalities amongst children and young people, to include both overall health outcomes and accessibility to health care services. • Commission high quality research dedicated to reducing child health inequalities and ensure findings and recommendations are acted upon by the NI Executive.
Suggested best practice	• The Intensive Family Support Services pilot in Belfast was identified as a positive example of what can be achieved through partnership and cooperation.

What did stakeholders say about the proposed indicators?

Childhood obesity: *Percentage of Primary 1/Year 8 children who are obese – including breakdown by deprivation quintiles to examine the impact of deprivation.*



n=103

Category of Response	Summary Themes
Support	• Obesity is a public health priority - parents and children need to understand the implications of the choices they make about the food they eat. • Strong relationship between deprivation and childhood obesity.
Further expansion/ clarification	• Need to consider children and young people who are underfed due to poverty. • Should also measure obesity at other developmental stages, e.g. pre-primary and teenage years. • Clear link to the play outcome. Children and young people need more access to open spaces and physical activity. Proposal to measure levels of physical activity in schools. • A breakdown in deprivation quintiles would support all indicators. • Propose positive reframing of indicator, i.e. % of children at healthy weight.
Problems/ gaps	• Need to balance issue with problems linked to self-image. Should increase in levels of anorexia be measured or considered?

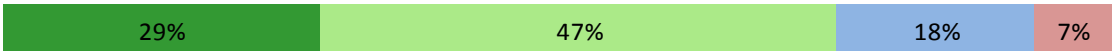
Actions	• More work required when following up on identification of an obese child – limited intervention. • Need a focus on increased physical activity within schools. • Advocate expansion of national programmes to measure children after birth, before school and into adolescence.
Suggested best practice	• The National Child Measurement Programme could be used to benchmark NI data.

Low birth weight: *The proportion of babies born at a low birth weight*.

n=102

Category of Response	Summary Themes
Support	• Low birth rate is a relevant headline indicator and the correlation to social deprivation should be monitored to examine the impact of deprivation. • Physical and mental health of a mother is often a key issue.
Further expansion/ clarification	• Some reservations about the relevance of this indicator – requires a better rationale for inclusion. Cannot be taken as a measure of health on its own. • Indicator should focus on 'Proportion of babies born at a low birth weight in relation to gestation age' to avoid the inclusion of premature babies within the statistic. • Should explore the incorporation of indicators used by the Infant Mental Health partnerships and Sure Start. • This is not the only indicator relevant for monitoring the health impacts/outcomes in early years – does not take account of other issues such as early attachment behaviours, maternal mental health, breast feeding. • Breakdown of data should be disaggregated to cover all groups in order to identify at risk children and young people, and monitor trends.
Actions	• Further action on smoking in pregnancy needed. • Maternal mental health should be considered. • Action should be focused on prospective parents. • Parents require help at the antenatal stage to develop good health habits for their children.

Mental health and emotional well-being: *Percentage of children and young people with GHQ12 scores less than or equal to 4 - signifying a possible mental health problem (GHQ12 is a screening device for identifying minor psychiatric disorders)*.



n=101

Category of Response	Summary Themes
Support	• Important that mental health issues are addressed. • There is a higher prevalence rate of mental health problems amongst certain groups of children and young people. • Social isolation has a major impact on children and young people's mental health. • The prioritisation of children's mental health alongside physical health is welcome.
Further expansion/ clarification	• Number of children and young people being referred to CAMHS and length of time taken for appointment might be more appropriate indicators. • Direct link to participation – if children and young people feel engaged, are active in youth work or volunteering, this will promote better mental health and allow them to discuss difficult issues. • Further detail should be provided on the GHQ12 tool within the Strategy. • Qualitative measures should also be considered. • Children's participation was proposed as a better measure. • Statistics on suicide and self-harm should also be considered.
Problems/ gaps	• Unsure how effective GHQ12 scoring would be at measuring the outcome – a low percentage of children and young people are assessed in this way. • Whilst the measure offers consistency it will require wider screening to be effective, and this will be costly. • Suggestion that GHQ12 is unsuitable for children under the age of 12, or is insufficiently robust or reliable.
Actions	• Should focus and *'double up'* on the interventions that connect crime, drugs and mental health problems. • Data should be disaggregated across the life of the child. • Investment in effective, accessible and high quality childcare, mental health services and therapies for visually impaired children and young people is vital.
Suggested best practice	• All children in NI should have their social, emotional and behavioural needs assessed using the 'Boxall Profile'. • Need to establish a link to the *Protect Life 2 Strategy*. • Some schools have invested in learning mentors, counselling support and specific mental health programmes to help children and young people improve their mental health at an early intervention stage.

Additional Comments

Category of Response	Summary Themes
Support	• Highlight links between health outcome and other outcomes e.g. impact on education, the importance of play and leisure etc. • Important that a preventative approach is taken – especially true of mental health. • Increase in waiting times for CAMHS, and vulnerabilities of young people transitioning from child to adult services, are important issues.
Further expansion/ clarification	• Further indicators could include (i) experiences of children and young people with a disability in accessing services; (ii) children and young people committing suicide or self-harming; (iii) levels of alcohol or drug misuse. • Advocate measures which correlate to issues outside of physical health – level of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) or Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) diagnosis or the number of children entering care system. • Should consider the CYPSP indicators (number of births, mothers who are smoking, breastfeeding, children in receipt of Disability Living Allowance (DLA), GP registrations, dental registrations, dental fillings, health card registrations, life expectancy, dependency and suicide). • Need to reference UNCRC and relevant concluding observations. • Need a stronger focus on 'family'.
Problems/ gaps	• Early diagnosis of issues that impact on child development is very important – e.g. speech and language issues and special educational needs. • Mental health, homelessness, educational attainment and young people involved in criminal justice system are all linked and inter related. Must recognise that a partnership approach is needed. • Any reduction in health visitor appointments and assessment could have a detrimental effect at early stage. • Greater expectations of schools to do more in terms of promoting healthy habits – need more training and resources.
Actions	• Establishment of good health habits at an early age is vital. Families need to be supported to provide healthy environments for their children.
Suggested best practice	• Consider *Measuring Mental Wellbeing in Children and Young People* 2015, Public Health England.

What did children and young people say?

Children and young people indicated that early intervention and prevention is key to promoting and supporting good mental health. They said that teaching children and young people to recognise the factors which may give rise to poor mental health, and support to develop skills

to look after their mental health, is needed at a much younger age, and should be built into the education curriculum.

Some of the key themes and issues raised by the children and young people who took part in the consultation in relation to physical and mental health are outlined below.

Key Themes	Comments made by children and young people
Awareness	• Taboo and stigma around mental health prevent many children and young people from seeking help. • Children and young people need to know where to find help.
Need to Address	• The need to talk about “rocky subjects”. • Widespread drug and alcohol abuse.
Access to Services and Programmes	• Lengthy waiting times for diagnoses. • Accessible school and/or community based services for help. • Introduce sport at a young age - important to physical and mental health. • ‘Time4Me’ primary school counselling service effective.
Prevention	• Some children and young people believe suicide is the only option – needs to be more training on suicide prevention. • Projects and youth clubs can help – they provide distraction and a positive influence.
Children and young people with disabilities	• Perception that professionals lack understanding of disabled young people’s needs. • Need more programmes for disabled children and young people to educate them about their disability, how to live a healthy lifestyle, and how to eat healthily.
Benefits of Youth clubs	• Importance of youth work and informal settings. • Youth clubs provide an environment where children and young people can talk about things and can be themselves.
Educate	• Sex education can be a difficult issue to discuss but it is important.
Services	• Desire for more after school clubs.
Parental role	• Important to educate parents - they have a role in encouraging children and young people to eat healthily.

- *"Need fruit trolley and water at school."*

What did parents/guardians say?

In relation to the proposed headline indicators for physical and mental health, many parents/guardians felt that they did not link directly to the outcome and were not addressing the actual issues. One respondent questioned how, in ten years' time, it would be possible to know if the outcome had been achieved. A few parents questioned the inclusion of a low birth weight measurement, suggesting that the type of birth should be considered, as this could possibly have a greater impact on the child. Other parents discussed issues relating to obesity, suggesting this is not a true reflection of whether a child is healthy or unhealthy.

It was suggested that an agreed definition on what constitutes a mental health problem would be helpful. It was also suggested that more education is required in this area, especially to support those who may suffer with mental health issues in silence.

One parent talked about a disparity of mental health provision and associated funding between rural and urban areas.

Parents suggested that the NI Executive should consider offering more support, advice and strategies to promote physical and mental health programmes to first-time parents, which in turn could be adapted and offered out to teens in schools.

Parents called for a more strategic approach to mental health, with greater access to counselling services and greater emphasis on building resilience in children and young people. One group of parents also commented on the link between health and play and leisure and suggested a greater emphasis on play, sport or Physical Education in school would improve health outcomes.

Key Points

Some of the key points raised in relation to physical and mental health include:

- **Mental health needs to be given the same focus and attention as physical health** including funding of services.
- Need to **consider the social determinants** of poor physical and mental health.
- For each of the health indicators, the provision of **disaggregated data across Section 75** groups/areas requiring greatest effort, would help to identify where outcomes are/are not improving. The **UNESCO work on Child Rights Indicators** could also be used to inform the final indicators.
- An appropriate **indicator for mental health of u16s is important** and should be developed as a matter of priority. Further indicators which could assist in identifying early signs of poor emotional and mental wellbeing should be considered perhaps via a self-reported scale.
- **Children and young people should feel comfortable to access appropriate health services**. An indicator focusing on either their satisfaction of services

provided, level of responsiveness to need or waiting times for child services may be helpful.

- **Early stage intervention is key** e.g. through the provision of positive health messages to families and schools. NI's low rate of breast-feeding and high rate of smoking during and after pregnancy are continuing concerns.
- **Mental and emotional well-being** ('wellness') needs to be promoted at an early age to help children and young people feel confident to **discuss issues related to mental health and remove stigma. Parental mental health should also be considered**.
- **Multi-agency approach** to promoting and reinforcing health messages is important.
- Examples of good working practices or services have been highlighted, although the **availability of many services is limited** and may be determined by location or school attended.
- There are **significant pressures on services** - particularly true of mental health services. Need to have **better transitioning support** for young people moving from children's services to adult services.
- Need to consider the **important role of parents, family and stable home environment** in shaping a child's physical and mental health.
- **Children and young people with disabilities can often face many barriers** to securing positive outcomes across a range of areas including play, education and economic well-being - health outcomes should not be the only focus. The **UNCRPD, along with the UNCRC, is a key document within this context.**
- There are clear links between the outcomes for play and leisure and contribution to society, and how these impact on positive physical and mental health. **Youth work/youth groups regarded as a useful context for young people to talk about difficult issues.**

Play and Leisure

What was proposed?

The outcome proposed was that *all children and young people enjoy play and leisure.*

The draft Strategy identified a series of issues in relation to play and leisure opportunities including societal barriers which restrict play and leisure; the diminishing nature of play experiences; reduction in the number of children and young people playing outside; and the fact such issues are often overlooked during the policymaking process.

In order to support the realisation of this outcome, the draft Strategy identified a number of areas where it is proposed that the greatest effort is needed. These were:

- ***Early years***
- ***Children and young people with a disability***
- ***Children and young people in poverty***
- ***Young People***

The headline indicator proposed was:

Enjoyment of play and leisure: The enjoyment experienced by children and young people as they play in their homes, their communities, their schools and their local play facilities.

The advice of the Children's Commissioner

Key points made by NICCY in response to consultation are as follows:

The outcome identifies many of the key issues affecting children's access to play and leisure, but does not reflect other aspects of Article 31 of the UNCRC, namely the importance of rest and leisure (in terms of children and young people having free time during which they are not involved in activities, work or study), and being able to participate in sports and cultural activities. The outcome should better reflect UN General Comment 17 on this subject and the recommendations in paragraph 74 of the 2016 UNCRC Concluding Observations.

The indicator for the outcome only reflects play in a very limited sense – mainly relevant to younger children. There is a lack of reference to sports; cultural and arts activities; leisure activities for teenagers; and time for children and young people to rest and relax. A broader set of indicators should be adopted to reflect all of these activities, disaggregated to allow for the tracking of outcomes for groups of children identified as particularly disadvantaged, including older young people; those in poverty; looked after children; and those with disabilities. Process indicators could be developed to track increases in spending on such activities and the number of children and young people accessing them.

The commitment of the NI Executive and Government Departments to the Play and Leisure outcome seems to be limited to the context of the allocation of resources.

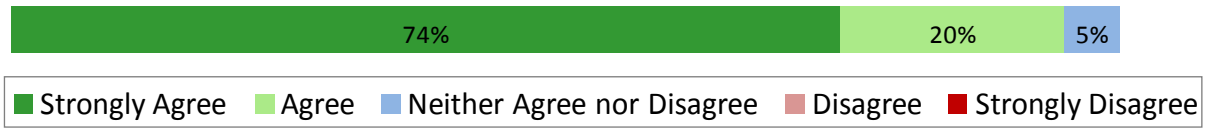
What did stakeholders say about the areas of greatest effort?

Early years: *Play and leisure needs to be encouraged and supported from birth.*

n=110

Category of Response	Summary Themes
Support	• *'Engagement in play is a good proxy for short and long-term indicators of wellbeing.'* • *'Early years' development is central to the success of this Strategy and other Executive strategies.'* • Acknowledgement of value of play in helping children to acquire essential skills, and contributing to key aspects of their development. • Play recognised as integral to children's learning.
Further expansion/ clarification	• Article 31 of the UNCRC should be referenced. • More information required in relation to the main objectives underpinning this area and how delivery of the outcome will be undertaken and monitored.
Problems/ gaps	• Inaccessibility of support to some parents during early years. • Afterschool clubs should focus more on play rather than homework. • Concern regarding the overuse of technology in play e.g. tablets and games consoles.
Actions	• Formal play training required for childminders to support development of children's skills and confidence. • Some parents may require support to understand the value and importance of play in children's development. • Important to embed the play and leisure policy across pre-school, early years settings, schools and youth provision.
Suggested best practice	• Current and planned play provision through Belfast City Council. • Helpful focus on play and leisure in courses provided through Stranmillis University College. • Council for Catholic Maintained Schools' (CCMS) role in supporting schools towards '*the realisation of an effective, purposeful, and productive play based curriculum'.*

Children and young people with a disability: *Children with a disability, and their families, require additional support for play and leisure activities.*



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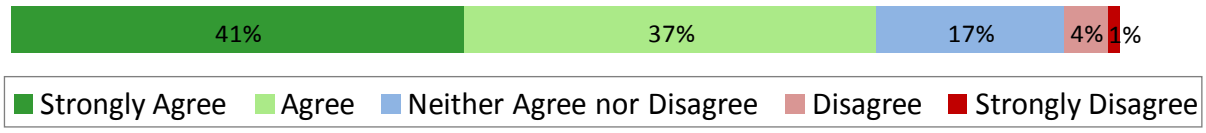
Category of Response	Summary Themes
Support	• Significant proportion of respondents highlighted the barriers to play and leisure facilities for children with disabilities or special needs.
Further expansion/ clarification	• Further clarity required in relation to 'additional support'. Suggested re-wording *'...maximise opportunities for the inclusive participation of children and young people with a disability and their families for play and leisure activities'.*
Problems/ gaps	• Specific groups of families or disabled children should be considered e.g. children with sight loss; and families with disabled children experiencing financial hardship. • Provision of appropriate leisure activities for older young people with disabilities. • *Playboard* research has highlighted barriers to play, including a lack of community support, lack of accessible play provision and lack of understanding about the play design process.
Actions	• Need to improve general accessibility to well-maintained play equipment and spaces for children and young people with disabilities. • Consistent approach should be taken to supporting children and young people with disabilities. • Need to promote the inclusion of children and young people with disabilities '*without limitation'*, e.g. through better designed, quality play equipment and facilities, provision of more swimming pools (with appropriate access), sensory pools, sensory rooms, disabled toilets and improved access for wheelchair users at playparks, zoos and cinemas. • More financial investment in training, resources, and partnership working required.
Suggested best practice	• Belfast City Council considers accessibility and disabled users in relation to all its fixed play equipment, and recently developed a sensory garden. • Important role of childminders in providing '*inclusive play opportunities within their homes'.*

Children and young people in poverty: *Children from less affluent backgrounds are much less likely to participate in structured play, cultural or arts-based activities.*



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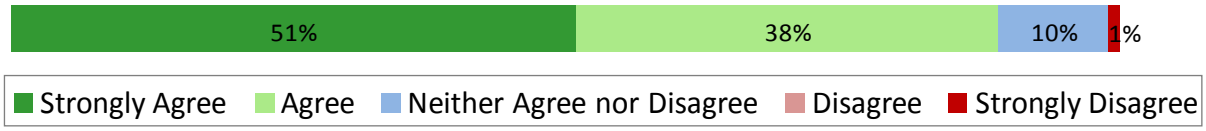
Category of Response	Summary Themes
Support	• Value of unstructured play recognised. • Concern that children from less affluent backgrounds are '*less likely to engage in Arts'* and that *'all children and young people, regardless of background should be encouraged to participate in structured play - cultural or arts based'.*
Problems/ gaps	• Impact of poverty should be considered in relation to structured and unstructured play opportunities. • Proposal *'overlooks other groups of children and young people whose participation is limited'*, e.g. newcomer and looked after children, carers, those living in rural areas and those within the youth justice system.
Actions	• Need for more funding. • Should have more free, accessible arts/cultural events in communities. • Need for greater support to parents; *'[Provide] parents with more information on the importance of play and child development'* and *'More subsidised afterschool activities within the realm of wraparound care'.*
Suggested best practice	• Effective play provision available for children in less affluent areas through after school clubs run by schools and PTAs. • *Sure Starts* provide important opportunities.

Young people: *It is important that teenagers are given the freedom, time and space to enjoy self-directed play and leisure time.*



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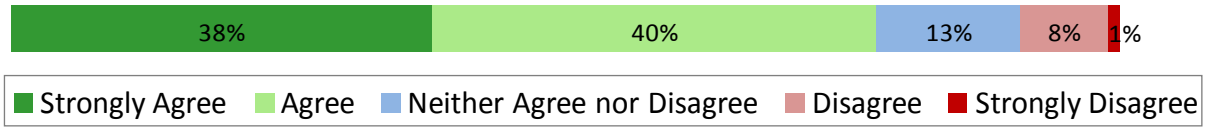
Category of Response	Summary Themes
Support	• Young people need time *'just to be'*, to '*have space to socialise'* and to access '*opportunities that have a positive effect on their physical and mental health'.* • Perception that *'too much time is directed to educational attainment'.*
Problems/ gaps	• Need to ensure that the circumstances and specific needs of certain children and young people are taken into account, including looked after children; those with disabilities (sight loss was highlighted); children and young people in hospital; and children and young people within the youth justice system. • Negative attitudes to young people *'hanging out'* in their communities is unhelpful. • The prohibitive cost of formal, recreational activities, and difficulties for young people in rural areas accessing urban-based activities.

	• Irish Medium youth work and the importance of providing appropriate resources noted.
Actions	• More appropriate, safe social spaces required. • Need to establish a better understanding of the purpose of shared spaces - *'Need opportunities to engage with teenagers in constructive and creative activities.'* • Need more opportunities for young people to participate in leisure activities - '*Young people should be able to escape the pressures of daily life'* and *'to use free time positively.'* • More 'rehabilitation workers' required for young people with sight loss to assist them to move independently. • Need to address negative portrayal of young people in the media. • Important to ensure young people *'stay safe',* and *'take responsibility for their actions'.* • Need to*; 'facilitate dialogue between concerned adults, young people and youth activity providers to promote mutual respect, understanding and tolerance'*. • More Government investment and resources required.

What did stakeholders say about the proposed indicators?

Enjoyment of play and leisure: *The enjoyment experienced by children and young people as they play in their homes, their communities, their schools and their local play facilities.*



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Category of Response	Summary Themes
Support	• Agreed that by achieving this… '*Children will be healthier and less stressed/anxious'* and '…*will experience better attendance at school with greater success'.*
Further expansion/ clarification	• Difficult to measure this indicator. • Indicator is too subjective, and a data development agenda is required to enable the collection of '*rigorous data regarding the level of access, quality of experience and impact of these experiences'.* • Participation measures should be used to capture the number, quality and accessibility of play facilities in local areas; *'We need to assess a wider range of factors including the level of play value and quality associated with settings, the level of access to play, the amount of time available for play, and the level of permission afforded to play within wider society'.*

	• Desirability of play in the natural environment and children's proximity to green space should be measured. • Undertake a study of intergenerational opportunities for outdoor play in the natural environment. • Indicator should be aligned to areas of greatest need, e.g. play in rural communities, children with disabilities, time for play, children's enjoyment of play and quality of play spaces. • Indicators should be expanded to include activities; *'beyond a child or young person's immediate environment' which contribute to the development of children and young people…'*
Problems/ gaps	• Some indoor pursuits e.g. playing with tablets or watching TV are barriers to active outdoor participation.
Actions	• Need to *'challenge prejudicial attitudes and address hate crime to ensure equal access to public spaces'*. • Need to *'increase the number of young women taking part in different forms of exercise'*. • Increase provision of play facilities.
Suggested best practice	• *Playboard's* 'Young researcher model' provides an '*effective mechanism to measure children's experiences of play in their communities'*. KLT Survey identified as a potential tool to measure children's enjoyment of play.

Additional Comments

Category of Response	Summary Themes
Support	• Benefits of play and leisure recognised in relation to children and young people's health, wellbeing and development. • Promoting this outcome should help to redress the balance between work and play.
Further expansion/ clarification	• Need to review the proposed indicator and identify more specific targets. • Additional indicators proposed include: women's and transgender young people's participation in sport; children and young people from different social groups' use of play facilities; the value of play; and play facilities which require improvement.
Problems/ gaps	• Recognition of various social, financial, practical and cultural barriers to play, for children and young people. • Specific groups of children and young people experience particular barriers including: looked after children; young carers; children and young people in Education Other Than At School (EOTAS); children and young people with autism; and children and young people living in rural areas.

Actions	• Need for *'sufficient, sustainable resources'*. • Reference to the duty on councils to promote play. • Play should be a key issue within community plans. • Schools should be used more widely by communities. • Strategy should *'take account of the social context in which young people play and enjoy leisure activities'*.
Suggested best practice	• DE Extended School Programme which '*aims to improve achievement levels for disadvantaged young people by providing additional support'.* • Play-related practice in Scandinavia and Wales.

What did children and young people say?

Many young people spoke about the need for a more varied curriculum and described a more rounded educational system. They said that non-academic subjects and learning life skills are important, and spoke about the need to be treated as individuals.

Some of the key themes and issues raised by the children and young people who took part in the consultation are outlined below.

Key Themes	Comments made by children and young people
Appropriate Play	• Need for good environments so children and young people can go out and play sports or socialise. • Rural places can prevent access to youth provision. • *"Our park is just a drinking den."*
Affordable	• Difficulty getting transport to larger urban areas. • Schools and sports clubs should be open up to more public use. • Reduced prices for swimming/sporting activities.
Children and young people with disabilities	• If not enough care support is available it can be difficult for young people with disabilities to take part in youth club activities. • *"Clubs and facilities exist but in some areas they aren't kept open into night time."*
Outdoor Play	• Need better outdoor equipment.
Play in School setting	• Bullying most likely to happen during break times, so schools need to promote good relations in the playground. • Focus on academic achievement is a barrier to play.

Negative Stereotyping of	• *"People think the worst of all young people – there's a prejudice against us."* • Play and leisure could contribute to mental health by reducing stress and anxiety.
Youth Clubs	• *"If it wasn't for the youth club, I'd have nowhere to go."* • *"There should be more money for youth groups – you can have fun and that chills you out."* • *"You can do sport, drama and learn about stuff in a way that you can take it in."*

What did parents/guardians say?

It was suggested that the proposed indicator was quite broad and could be open to interpretation. A clearer definition of play, and an understanding of what the NI Executive consider as play, was proposed in order to support the measurement. The majority of parents who participated in the consultation suggested that schools should take more responsibility for play, and could assist with the measurement of this particular outcome. They added that schools should provide a variety of play activities with more outdoor programmes and greater encouragement for quieter children and young people. Parents also commented on the amount of time required to complete homework in the evening and how this impacted on time for play or leisure. They expressed the opinion that a lot of children and people do not have sufficient play opportunities – despite the fact that play is very important for their development:

'Play isn't encouraged enough in schools. Most activities are extra-curricular and none of the activities from my experience do enough to promote and encourage parental participation.'

Some parents questioned whether the Strategy would be implemented and suggested that money should be spent updating and refurbishing play parks; while other parents felt the money should be invested in local community groups to facilitate staff. Parents suggested that parents/guardians, and those working with children, need more education on play.

Local sport clubs, churches and local councils were seen as potential delivery partners for play opportunities. Councils, in particular, were seen as having a duty to promote play and leisure and offer services. One group of parents felt that their local parks were not suitable for their children, with safety being a chief concern.

'In some areas children and young people can't get out to play and they are not safe.'

The parents/guardians suggested that engaging with and obtaining the views of parents and children and young people will help to inform decision makers on what is needed and desired when further proposals on play are being developed. They suggested that social media may be an effective way of engaging with stakeholders on this issue.

Parents/guardians also recommended that play areas are monitored and evaluated to determine their use and value.

Key Points

Some of the key points in relation to play and leisure include:

- A need to **consider the full range of play and leisure**, as detailed in UN General Comment 17 as policies/programmes prepared and indicators/measurements developed. This includes **play and leisure as well as sports, cultural activities, arts and time for rest and relaxation**.
- Play is **fundamental to child development** and supports positive outcomes in many different areas. It is, however, **difficult to measure** – careful thinking is therefore required in relation to appropriate indicator(s).
- **Barriers to play are recognised as significant**, including lack of services, parental time/skills, time for child or young person and the growth in technology etc.
- **Children and young people with disabilities and special educational needs often miss out on play opportunities** therefore more needs to be done to provide appropriate and accessible play experiences. **Exclusion from play recognised as social exclusion**. Important that the **needs of all children and young people are considered** by those facilitating, promoting or designing play.
- **Parents, child-minders, educators and other stakeholders all require a good understanding of the benefits of play and how they can promote it.** Importance of play should be embedded in early years settings, schools and youth provision.
- **Need a range of free or low-cost play and leisure opportunities**, especially structured opportunities relating to culture or the arts although these are often too costly which can limit children and young people's participation.
- **Play is individual to each child or young person**, and changes dramatically as children get older when having a safe space and time to socialise becomes more important.
- **Negative stereotyping** impacts on a young person's ability to socialise in a public space.
- As well as enjoyment of play, the indicator needs to factor in the **value of available play opportunities and accessibility.**
- **Access to green space and outdoor play** was seen as particularly valuable, with a clear link to the **environmental well-being** outcome.
- **Schools are a key partner to promoting play** – there is a need for a variety of play, leisure, sports and arts within school. Time spent on homework is a barrier to play in the home.

Learning and Achieving

What was proposed?

The outcome proposed was that *all children and young people learn and achieve.*

The areas of greatest effort identified were:

- ***Pupils entitled to free school meals (Free School Meal Entitlement – FSME)***
- ***Children and young people with Special Educational Needs (SEN)***
- ***Care experienced children and young people***
- ***Newcomer, Traveller and Roma children and young people***
- ***Children and young people in custody.***

The headline indicators proposed were:

- **Child development**: Percentage of children who are at the appropriate stage of development in their immediate pre-school year.
- **Educational attainment**: Percentage of school leavers achieving level 2 qualifications.
- **Education inequality**: Gap between % of non FSME school leavers and % of FSME school leavers achieving level 2 qualifications.

The advice of the Children's Commissioner

Key points made by NICCY in response to consultation are as follows:

NICCY is pleased that this outcome recognises children and young people's right to education and goes beyond solely academic achievement to provide clarity about the purpose of education, which the UNCRC states is the development of the child's personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential.

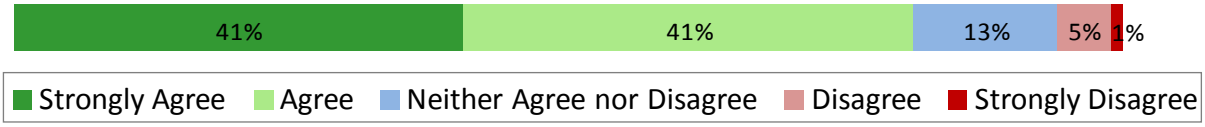
It is positive that the outcome identifies groups of children and young people who are particularly disadvantaged, although there is less emphasis on the development of the child's personality, talents and abilities. This is also true of the indicators which focus entirely on academic attainment and not on the promotion of well-being or the broader development of children and young people's personality, talents and abilities. The inclusion of a well-being measurement within the 'Learning and Achievement' outcome is recommended.

The indicators are focused on early years (age 3) and GCSE level (age 16) - the greater part of a child's life between these two stages also needs to be reflected in the indicators and actions in the delivery plans. Additional indicators to reflect the beginning of primary school, transition to post-primary education, and at age 18 are recommended. The development of measures to assess the educational 'distance travelled', recognising that the general milestones may not be an appropriate measure of attainment for some children e.g. some newcomer children with limited experience of education and language difficulties, or children who have experienced disruptions in their education for various reasons, is suggested.

The UN 2016 Concluding Observations have not been addressed in the draft Strategy, including issues around inclusion of children with disabilities in mainstream schools, sexual and reproductive health education, academic selection, use of exclusions, integrated education and mandatory child rights education.

What did stakeholders say about the areas of greatest effort?

Pupils entitled to free school meals: *Evidence clearly demonstrates that social disadvantage has the greatest single impact on attainment. It is important that our most disadvantaged learners are given particular focus.*



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Category of response	Summary themes
Support	• Disadvantaged learners need additional support. • Disproportionate number of underachieving children and young people come from areas of deprivation.
Further expansion/ clarification	• Need to ensure education is more broadly defined to also include a focus on personality, talents and abilities.
Problems/ gaps	• Difficulties for families on low incomes who do not qualify for FSME. • Impact of welfare reform may exacerbate the issue. • Problems related to disadvantage are deep rooted and long lasting.
Actions	• Need to consider and monitor the relationship between FSME and other outcomes for children and young people. • Need to target actions to support boys (particularly Protestant boys) and children and young people with disabilities. • Costs of meals should be reduced for families who may be struggling but do not qualify for FSME. • Need to focus on early years. • Communities and parents need support to facilitate a learning environment in the home. • Need to consider ways to reduce the potential stigma of FSME.
Suggested best practice	• The Education Authority (EA) supports the provision of additional weighted allowances to schools on the basis of targeting social need. • *Full Service Community Network* works with very socially disadvantaged children and young people (high levels of FSME), supporting academic achievement through focused work by school staff and CVS providers.

	• Teacher training colleges are promoting the importance of ensuring that all children and young people are given opportunities to participate within the school environment.

Children and young people with Special Educational Needs (SEN): *Work needs to continue to ensure that all pupils with learning difficulties receive a high quality education and can fulfil their potential.*

n=98

Category of response	Summary themes
Further expansion/ clarification	• 'Learning difficulties' must encompass a broad spectrum of needs. • Consider the impact of speech and language difficulties and how they impact wider development.
Problems/ gaps	• Role of speech and language therapists is vital.
Actions	• Young people should participate in decisions which impact their lives, especially at transition stage. • Simple practical actions are required to ensure inclusivity of children and young people with SEN in schools. • This is a high priority area for more resources – particularly in early years/pre-school settings. • Early diagnosis is required along with support for parents on how to manage the diagnosis. • Transition stages require a specific focus. • Classroom assistants require more training, guidance and support.
Suggested best practice	• Disability Act and SEN Code of Practice should provide a framework of reference for parents, schools, EA, Health and Social Care Trusts (HSCTs) and voluntary organisations. • Good practice and provision in special schools. • UN recommends a human rights based approach to disability and a comprehensive strategy for the inclusion of children with disabilities. • The EA works in partnership with youth settings, early years, schools and multi-disciplinary bodies to ensure access to learning and development for all children and young people. • Learning Support Centres for children and teachers within mainstream schools.

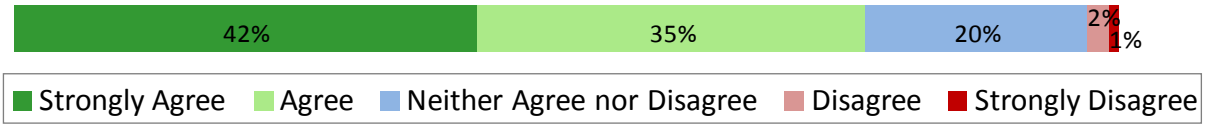
Care experienced children and young people: *Children and young people leaving care are at greater risk of not transitioning to employment, education or training. It is important that they*

are supported during their education, and as they transition out of education and out of care, to ensure they experience positive outcomes.

n=96

Category of response	Summary themes
Support	• An important area - a better understanding of the impact of trauma, attachment difficulties and abuse is required.
Problems/ gaps	• Young people leaving care typically transition with complex needs. There are significant barriers to educational attainment for these young people. • Stigma attached to living in care, or having previously lived in care, can subject children and young people to negative stereotyping.
Actions	• Need a co-ordinated and consistent approach between DE and DoH to providing support for care experienced children and young people. • Greater support required during times of transition. • Increased student maintenance grants or other forms of support for looked after children required. • More research into the experience of young people within care should be undertaken – e.g. how do they view care settings and how could they be improved?
Suggested best practice	• A number of education support services provide high quality transition advice, support and personal development to care experienced children and young people.

Newcomer, Traveller and Roma children and young people: *There is a clear and demonstrable attainment gap for children and young people who are newcomers to NI, from the Traveller or Roma communities*.



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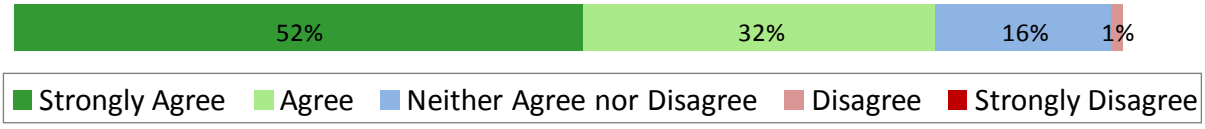
Category of response	Summary themes
Support	• Note significant increase in the number of newcomer children and children who have English as an additional language. • Children and young people who are newcomers can face significant disadvantage and discrimination.

Further expansion/ clarification	• An indicator on attendance rates might be useful. • Important to consider relationship between various groups requiring more support e.g. children and young people with FSME and newcomers.
Problems/ gaps	• Non-attendance is a significant issue to be addressed. • Insufficient English language support. • Communication with parents can be difficult. • Cultural issues may affect access to education.
Actions	• Need effective strategies to teach newcomer pupils, engage parents and provide accessible information. • Need for training and capacity building within schools to cope with additional pressures. • Important to work with schools and other partners to support inclusion. • Review the effectiveness of current additional language support.
Suggested best practice	• Support is currently available through DE and the Intercultural Education Service (run by EA). . • The *Integrated Education Fund* (IEF) has developed a toolkit for any school to support its approach to educating newcomer and minority pupils.

Children and young people in custody: *These young people should receive education provision to the same standards, under the same legal basis, as any other young person.*



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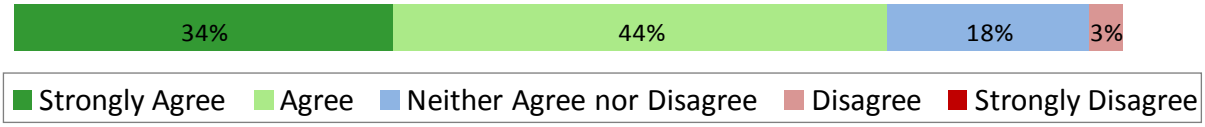
Category of response	Summary themes
Support	• Education is a key support for young people if they are to break the cycle of repeat offending. • Education will provide a young person with self-worth and direction.
Further expansion/ clarification	• There is an important link to play and leisure – young people in custody need to enjoy play and leisure time and this could support educational outcomes. • Also need to consider the learning needs of young people who may not respond to a traditional school setting.
Problems/ gaps	• There are limitations to teaching young people outside the school setting – the standard should be equal for all. • Need to ensure better communication between EOTAS centres and children and young people's homes and schools.
Actions	• Greater partnership working required to address needs and enhance long term outcomes

	• Should consider providing civic education to children and young people either in custody or those who have left custody. • Important to address multiple aspects of these children's lives.
Suggested best practice	• Positive that Woodlands is now an EOTAS centre.

What did stakeholders say about the indicators?

Child development: *Percentage of children who are at the appropriate stage of development in their immediate pre-school year*.



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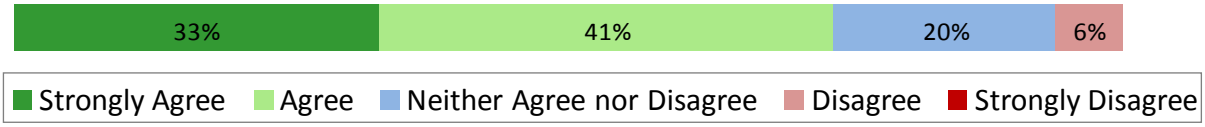
Category of response	Summary themes
Support	• Important to emphasise achievement of child development milestones in the earliest years - this provides a sound basis on which to build children's later development.
Further expansion/ clarification	• Parent's role as the first educator should be emphasised – value of education in the home is vital. An indicator for this might be helpful. • Essential to understand the factors that contribute to development e.g. socio-economic status. • Could also measure social and emotional development at various stages. • Indicator should be disaggregated across areas of greatest effort. • Need to define 'appropriate stage of development'.
Problems/ gaps	• Shortage of Health Visitors means pre-school children and parents do not always have access to standard reviews. • Significant age gap across school starters (up to 11 months) which impacts on development.
Actions	• Quality childcare is required if children are to reach the appropriate stage of development in their immediate pre-school year. • Need actions beyond the early years, education and health sector. Economic regeneration and built environment professionals also have a role.
Suggested best practice	• Community planning will have a positive impact on the wellbeing of our children and young people, with direct relevance to the Strategy. • Child Development Index (CDI) which measures education, health and nutrition is a useful tool.

Educational attainment: *Percentage of school leavers achieving level 2 qualifications ~ five+ GCSEs at A*-C or equivalent, including GCSE English and Maths (including equivalent level 2 qualifications e.g. BTEC level 2 certificates/diplomas).*



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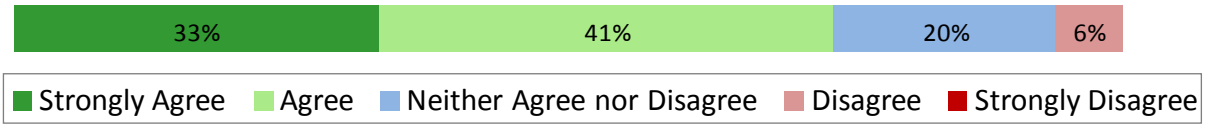
Category of response	Summary themes
Further expansion/ clarification	• Range of indicators needed: consider vocational qualifications; children and young people not taking the GSCE route; and non-academic indicators. • Too simplistic to only consider GSCEs. Explore other factors over a longer time period. Include appropriate indicators for educational progression of children and young people with SEN – the *'distance travelled'* i.e. improvement. • Include a measure at Primary level too.
Problems/ gaps	• Focus on young people who leave school with no qualifications. • Significant time gap between child development and GSCE indicators.
Actions	• Need to address barriers to attainment for children and young people across the areas of greatest effort and all Section 75 groups. • Need to ensure non-academic attainment is valued: develop skills, talents, abilities, personality etc.
Suggested best practice	• University of Birmingham has carried out research into other factors relating to children and young people reaching potential, including mobility, independence skills and confidence.

Educational inequality: *Gap between percentage of non-FSME school leavers and percentage of FSME school leavers achieving level 2 qualifications - 5+ GCSEs at A*-C or equivalent, including GCSE English and Maths (including equivalent level 2 qualifications e.g. BTEC level 2 certificates/diplomas).*



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Category of response	Summary themes
Support	• Important indicator – education system must look after needs of all children and young people, particularly those with disabilities, with special education needs (SEN), looked after children, those in poverty, newcomers and carers.

Further expansion/ clarification	• Non-academic and pastoral elements should also be considered. • Disaggregation of the educational attainment indicator would provide data on inequality for different groups of children and young people. • GCSE outcomes and FSME are blunt indicators – need broader range of more refined measures.
Actions	• Parents/guardians should be supported to understand the importance of education so they can provide a positive learning environment. • DE, Education Training Inspectorate (ETI), Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) and the EA should work together to offer a wider range of non-GCSE qualifications to pupils at the lower end of achievement standards. • Need to identify families struggling financially who are not on benefits. Schools would often be aware of such families and could direct to Family Support Hubs. • Section 4 of the Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Act (NI) 2016 legislates specifically for this co-operation, but only relates to children at 4 years and 16 years of age. The Strategy must remedy this.
Suggested best practice	• Tackling educational inequality and ensuring all children and young people can access an education that will enable them to develop to their full potential is not only an investment in the future of NI, but a key outcome within many of the 11 Community Plans.

Additional Comments

Category of response	**Summary themes**
Support	• Early intervention critical: *Sure Starts* are an important service. • Importance of utilising play to promote learning especially in early years.
Further expansion/ clarification	• Pastoral care very important – schools need to focus on non-academic success also. • Need to broaden the concept of achievement. • Potential additional indicators proposed: - numbers attending school; - English as additional language; - attendance levels; - number of pupils progressing to Higher Education, Further Education, Employment or vocational equivalent, - number of school leavers achieving 2 A-levels; - number of school leaverswith no GCSEs; and

	- number of pupils with SEN Statements. • Suggest a self-reported indicator on enjoyment of school. • Intermediate measurement to track development from pre-school to end of primary, and to provide a baseline to assess secondary education system, would be useful. • Need to measure socio-emotional development, confidence and resilience.
Problems/ gaps	• *'Curriculum in need of radical overhaul to reflect emerging opportunities*.' Wider employability skills need to be considered – good communication, problem solving, critical thinking, team working and people management. • Cost of school transport increasingly an issue, especially in rural areas. • Waiting times for Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) assessment. • Schools can struggle with pupils with challenging behaviours.
Actions	• Importance of using school as a pathway to build good relations across communities, including use of school buildings for community work. • In relation to integrated and shared education, DE should work with Councils/Community Planning to meet individual community needs. • Schools need to teach 'life skills' – money management, interview skills, CV writing etc.
Suggested best practice	• Programmes such as the Prince's Trust 'Achieve' programme help young people develop skills and confidence to engage and succeed in education.

What did children and young people say?

While describing school as a positive experience, children and young people suggested there should be less of an emphasis on exams and more alternative approaches to learning identified as a measure of success. Concern about inequalities in education, particularly in relation to the selective system and provision for children with disabilities, was also a recurrent theme.

Other areas highlighted by children and young people in relation to learning and achievement are outlined below.

Key Themes	Comments made by children and young people
Children and young people with SEN	• Need more support for pupils with SEN and English as a Second Language (ESL). • Need time for teachers to plan the best activities. • All classroom assistants should receive Disability Awareness training.

	• Need to address barriers to inclusion in school life – such as door access, hearing loop etc.
Children and young people with SEN – Post-secondary and Employment	• Lack of options in post-secondary level education. • Children and young people need more say about what happens on their academic journey – lack of planning at transition stage. • Employers need to be educated about disability issues.
School	• Too much emphasis on academic attainment and exam success. • Excessive workloads - an issue for all ages and compounded by homework. • People have different skills - education should look at the individual child.
Transfer Test	• Unfair and ineffective. • Stress, extra homework. • Teachers focusing on children doing the transfer. • Children have to rebuild their confidence.
Inequality in Education	• *'There are different facilities in different schools – people get different treatment – grammar versus secondary. It's discrimination.'*
Bullying	• Teachers could benefit from more training in relation to dealing with bullying and supporting children, particularly those experiencing stress. • *'There is more on-line bullying. It's more subtle and hard for teachers to do anything.'*
Integrated Education	• Integrated education system favoured but learned little about other religions.
Youth Work and informal learning	• *'Youth work can help someone to develop their character – it really gave me the confidence to speak out.'* • *'It's a chance to meet young people from all over the place – they can literally change your life.'*

What did parents/guardians say?

Parents/guardians were generally positive about the NI education system and many thought that the mechanisms of assessment were clear. However, some felt that children and young people should not be measured solely by their exam success, suggesting that they be

assessed throughout the school year. Parents expressed concern that children are assessed from Primary 1 and frequently on the basis of exam results. They proposed that the Strategy should promote a more holistic approach to assessment – looking beyond exam results and also considering the development of skills and personal qualities which are not necessarily academic. Parents also remarked on how children and young people develop at different rates and questioned what developmental area this outcome would focus on.

Commenting on transfer tests, parents said, *''There is too much pressure put on children and young people especially at the end of primary school with too much emphasis on 11 year olds to decide on transfer. Children and young people should be able to work at their own pace with support and guidance from key adults.'*

Parents suggested that all schools should follow one system which assesses children and young people's ability with minimal stress. One of the parents, originally from Scotland and now living in NI, shared her experiences of schooling:

'Scotland do monthly tests and children and young people are tested throughout the year which counts towards final marks.'

Some parents highlighted the impact of social media, commenting that children and young people are growing up in a 'digital age'. It was felt that this had an impact on their wellbeing and that parents needed more support especially around the use of social media.

The issue of SEN was also raised, with parents suggesting that there is not enough support for children with SEN in schools and such help is only available if a child has a statement.

Key Points

Key points raised during consultation in relation to learning and achieving include;

- Need to go beyond considering only the academic aspect of education to **focus on how education can develop a child's personality, talents and abilities and well-being.**
- Consider **interim indicators** between the ages of 3 and 16 to examine how children's education varies at different stages, with a **particular focus on transition stages**.
- Consider the **concept of 'distance travelled' or improvement** for different groups of young people, rather than a simple attainment indicator.
- **Disaggregated data** across the indicators would help to provide a clear evidence base for children and young people who are not achieving positive educational outcomes.
- A **broader indicator than GSCE attainment is required** as it may not be appropriate for those most at risk of poor outcomes. **The non-academic element of education and vocational qualifications should be considered.**
- Important to reference the **UN concluding observations** relating to the education system.

- Recognition that **parents need support to facilitate a learning environment** at home, and that communities and families need to value and promote education.
- **Poverty has both an impact on a child's education and a stigma attached** which can lead to social isolation in school, impacting on their development.
- The success of early intervention approaches and early years development requires the involvement of **many key partners including parents, health visitors, early years teachers, child-minders etc.**
- **Early intervention and early diagnosis are vital for children with SEN**. They and their families need support to understand the diagnosis and how it can be managed. Schools need to make all reasonable adjustments, some of which may be minor but absolutely critical. There is a recognised need to consider future outcomes for children with SEN, ensuring they have opportunities once they leave education.
- **Care experienced children have complex needs and face significant barriers** to educational attainment. A co-ordinated approach and additional support in times of transition for care-experienced children is essential.
- **Non-attendance** is a key issue for children and young people who are newcomer, Traveller or Roma – could perhaps be used as an indicator for these groups. **Cultural issues were perceived as affecting education and schools - teachers need support to manage the challenges faced within an ever-changing classroom.**
- Education was regarded as key in supporting young people to **break the cycle of crime and re-offending.**
- The importance of children and young people **enjoying school**, having access to pastoral education and developing **important life skills** e.g. managing money, developing resilience and understanding healthy relationships to prepare them for leaving education was highlighted.
- **Schools are a vital part of the community** and are expected to deliver a lot of services – they therefore need support/resources if they are to deliver all that is expected.

Safety and Stability

What was proposed?

The outcome proposed was *all children and young people live in safety and stability.*

The areas of greatest effort identified were:

- ***Youth homelessness***
- ***Looked after children***
- ***Internet safety***
- ***Children and young people under the threat of paramilitary intimidation***
- ***Children experiencing neglect or domestic violence***
- ***Children and young people in contact with the youth justice system***
- ***Family breakdown***

The headline indicators proposed were:

- **Youth homelessness:** Number of 16/17 year olds presenting as homeless.
- **First time entrants into the criminal justice system:** Number of first time entrants into the criminal justice system.
- **Victims of crime:** Number of young people who are victims of crime.
- **Child Contact Orders:** Number of repeat applications made.

The advice of the Children's Commissioner

Key points made by NICCY in response to consultation are as follows:

The inclusion of particular issues within the outcome such as the impact of paramilitary intimidation and violence; the need to effectively safeguard against Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) and the significance of transitions in children's lives is welcome. However, there are some absences from the Strategy, including the particular barriers to safety and stability faced by some children, such as those experiencing multiple adversities and young carers, and a lack of recognition of the vulnerability of some groups to abuse, including disabled children and children who go missing.

This outcome includes two aspects: safety and stability. The Strategy should pay greater regard to addressing stability in children's lives. It should reflect the importance of the full continuum of services and interventions that should be in place across this outcome, ranging from prevention and early intervention support, to protective and authoritative safeguarding, through to helping children and young people in their recovery from instability, violence and abuse; and should better recognise the profound impact on children's lives of living without safety or stability, including into adolescence and adulthood.

A clearer rationale should be evidenced for the areas identified as needing greatest effort. For example, sexual abuse and physical abuse are not referenced. The recognition that youth

homelessness should be addressed is welcome, but homelessness amongst families is not included.

The connection between areas identified as representing greatest need and the proposed indicators is weak, and the absence of indicators related to child protection and 'looked after' children is a concern.

A broader set of data should be tracked within this outcome, including self-reported information from children and young people. Examples of areas where data should be considered include: road safety and traffic accidents; CSE; paramilitary assault, and separated children. The data development agenda should explore capturing data relating to extended milestones or graduated transitions for children and young people who have lived without safety and stability.

The inclusion of young people involved with offending within this outcome area is commended, but the significant work undertaken in NI on youth justice over the last decade appears to have been overlooked. The inclusion of the indicator on the number of first time entrants into the criminal justice system is supported, but further indicators could be added concerning outcomes for young people leaving the youth justice system.

Disappointed that relevant 2016 UNCRC Concluding Observations are not reflected in the Strategy e.g. taking action against harmful practices (such as female genital mutilation (FGM) and honour based violence); ensuring protections for unaccompanied and other asylum seeking, refugee and migrant children; providing equal protection from physical punishment; and resourcing effective family support.

The issue of the Minimum Age of Criminal Responsibility should be reflected in the Strategy.

What did stakeholders say about the areas of greatest effort?

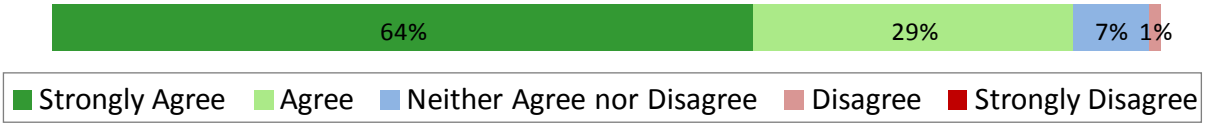
Youth Homelessness: *A young person cannot feel safe or live with any stability if they do not have a place they can call home.*

n=96

Category of response	Summary themes
Support	• Children and young people need a sense of belonging and safety – a *'stable home environment is fundamental to the well-being of a child and a lack thereof will impact on the child's health, education and other outcomes'.* • Youth homelessness often a direct/indirect consequence of other circumstances and can increase risk of violence to a young person and lead to crime and addiction. • Everyone needs a safe, secure place to call home. In today's society no one should be homeless.

	• A good living environment creates pride and positive community identity.
Further expansion/ clarification	• Needs greater consideration of the impact of homelessness on a young person's physical and mental health, education, employment opportunities and connection to society. It impacts on all outcomes. • Government needs to consider families more carefully when setting housing targets to prioritise their needs and those of children and young people. Definition of 'homelessness' should be reviewed to reflect young people who 'sofa-surf' or are at risk of homelessness. • Greater emphasis on prevention required (too often focus is crisis management) – assessing the root causes of youth homelessness. • Consider young people who are most at risk e.g. Traveller or care-experience children and young people.
Problems/ gaps	• NI has a large population of 'hidden homeless' – young people with no permanent residence who survive by staying with friends or occasionally sleeping rough, so it is difficult to determine accurate homeless figures. • Impact of homelessness, especially for a child or young person, is significant and long-lasting and problems continue even after the person has a permanent home. • Young people may not be homeless but may live in sub-standard housing – need to consider how this is measured and addressed.
Actions	• A more graduated/transitional approach is required for care experienced young people moving from supported accommodation to flexible support. • Family breakdown is a key factor in youth homelessness. Family mediation is crucial but other family interventions are also required.

Looked after children: *Looked after children may have experienced living conditions which are unsafe and unstable, leading to them leaving their family home and living in care. Important that whilst in care they are given the safety and stability they were previously denied.*



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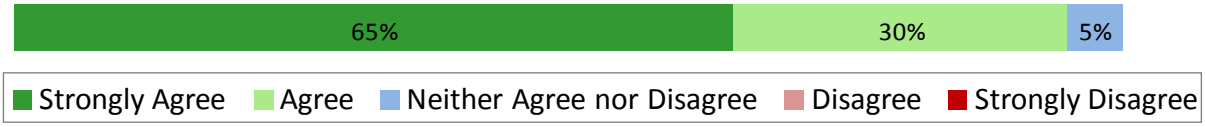
Category of response	Summary themes
Support	• Important that children and young people have safe places of care to live where they experience love, stability and security. • Important that care leavers are given support to adjust to life outside of care. • Safety and stability is paramount to other outcomes.
Further expansion/ clarification	• Strategy needs a greater emphasis on the role of foster parents and provision of adequate support for them.

	• The number of placements experienced by looked after children could be a useful indicator. • Different strategies and interventions may be required for children who need additional care and support.
Problems/ gaps	• Critical that looked after children have access to the same developmental opportunities as others in their peer group.
Actions	• Need for additional support to ensure young people are not moved around unnecessarily. • Care experienced children and young people need greater encouragement and support to engage with education, and develop healthy behaviours. • Actions detailed in the Marshall Report[8] should be considered.
Suggested best practice	• Importance of multi-disciplinary meetings, with school involvement • Supported lodging within Southern Health and Social Care Trust (SHSCT) area.

Internet safety: *Children and young people, and their parents, should be supported to develop the skills and knowledge necessary to stay safe online and on how to respond when subject to online abuse.*



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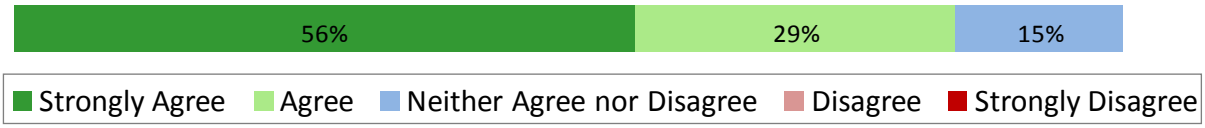
Category of response	Summary themes
Support	• Prevention is the best solution – training for everyone is paramount. • Cyber security, online bullying and internet safety are major issues. • Internet can also harm children's mental health. • Children with learning disabilities are particularly vulnerable in this area.
Further expansion/ clarification	• Consider how to measure the impact of social media (both positive and negative) on children and young people.
Problems/ gaps	• Children and their parents are often unsure about how to deal with cyber bullying.
Actions	• Education is key, both for children so they know how to stay safe, and for parents so they can 'police' online activity and protect their children. Teachers should also be provided with training and guidance. • Education required on how to report cyber-crime and cyber-bullying. • Co-operation across a range of bodies (Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland (SBNI), Schools, and PSNI etc.) is vital.

[8] https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/publications/marshall-report

Suggested best practice	• A range of support services exist to help children stay safe online and help parents develop their knowledge and skills

Children and young people under the threat of paramilitary intimidation: *Paramilitary intimidation can lead to feelings of instability and insecurity, causing the young person distress and leaving them isolated from family, friends and community.*



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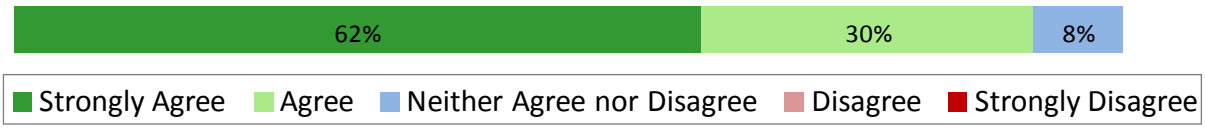
Category of response	Summary themes
Support	• An area highlighted by the UNESCO centre (Ulster University) in its development of child rights indicators. • Shared society and safe spaces are important if NI is to move forward in building a future of peace, stability and prosperity. • Impact of the NI Conflict is long lasting and generational, and affects physical and mental health.
Further expansion/ clarification	• Indicator relating to child victims of crime should be expanded to explicitly record levels of paramilitary intimidation or violence against children and young people.
Problems/ gaps	• Under-reporting of paramilitary threats/violence is an issue which an indicator or measure will need to consider. • School counselling is available but there is a stigma attached.
Actions	• Important to raise aspirations of young people and promote a shared future and shared space. • A review of the available funding and its impact should be carried out to ensure optimum usage.
Suggested best practice	• The UNCRC Concluding Observations state that the UK should/must? 'take immediate and effective measures to protect children and young people from violence by non-state actors involved in paramilitary style attacks as well as recruitment from such actors in violent activities.' • *The Fresh Start Agreement* panel report on the *Disbandment of Paramilitary Groups* recommends action to 'measurably reduce segregation in education and housing.' Education policy and strategic planning are major contributors to a peaceful society.

Children experiencing neglect or domestic violence: *Neglect or domestic violence affects any child or young person. The impact of such abuse on children and young people can be significant and long-lasting.*



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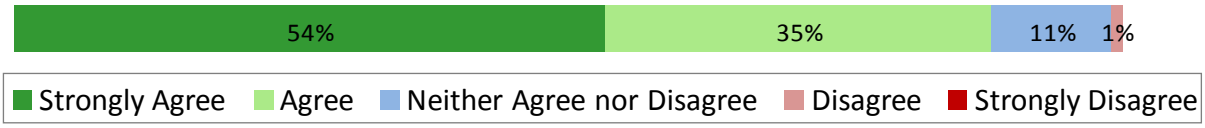
Category of response	Summary themes
Support	• Children and young people who witness abuse, or are abused themselves, suffer a significant and long-lasting impact on their well-being.
Further expansion/ clarification	• Strategy will require an action plan to tackle this issue, and a specific indicator on abuse and neglect of children and young people.
Problems/ gaps	• Gender based violence needs to be considered and addressed. Also emerging issues relating to CSE, FGM and honour-based violence. • Regarded as a hidden problem – challenges in providing meaningful support. • Refugee children can be particularly vulnerable – living in circumstances where they may be sharing accommodation with strangers.
Actions	• Actions should be included to address UNCRC comments in respect of corporal punishment in the family i.e. smacking/reasonable chastisement. • Need to consider children and young people living with a parent with mental illness and the impact this may have in terms of potential neglect and well-being. • Need to consider potential risks of children and young people living in self-contained accommodation. • Need to ratify the Istanbul Convention[9] to provide an obligation to exercise due diligence to protect women and men against violence.
Suggested best practice	• Significant research in this area demonstrates the scale of the problem.

Children and young people in contact with the youth justice system: *We must work to ensure that children and young people who come into contact with the youth justice system – including the children of prisoners – are not destined to have poorer life chances.*



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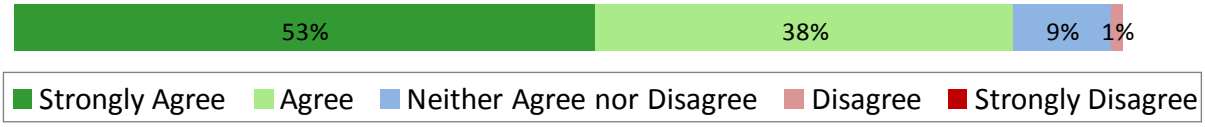
Category of response	Summary themes
Support	• Concluding observations state that that 'secure accommodation in NI is only used as a measure of last resort and for the shortest possible period of time.'
Further expansion/ clarification	• Monitoring/measurements should include the time spent by young people in custody and the length of time taken to be processed through the court system.

[9] https://rm.coe.int/168008482e

Actions	• Record how the rights of children and young people held in custody are protected, and the outcomes for children and young people who spend time in the youth justice system. • Need to consider children and young people with parents in prison and how their well-being/outcomes are affected. • A multi-agency approach is needed to engage with these young people, and education is vital to improve their outcomes.
Suggested best practice	• EA youth services work with the youth justice system to help ensure children and young people have access to a full range of educational support.

Family breakdown: *Children and young people have a right to preserve their family relations and a right to maintain direct contact with both parents on a regular basis, if that is in their best interests. We must ensure that those rights are respected and help parents to work through their difficulties in a way that does not cause additional stress and harm.*



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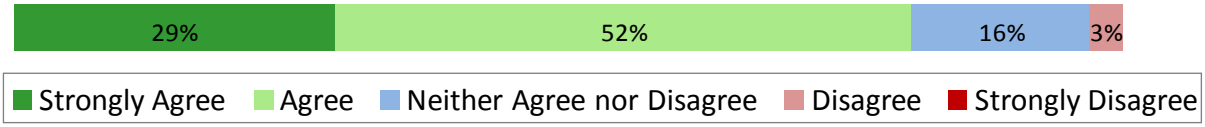
Category of response	Summary themes
Support	• Recognised as a crucial area of need. Noted that this can have a significant and long-term impact on children and young people, especially if breakdown occurs in early stages of childhood development and new 'extended family structures' appear. • Family breakdown recognised as a significant stressor for children and young people, impacting on emotional and mental health.
Further expansion/ clarification	• A clear definition of family breakdown is required.
Problems/ gaps	• Drug and alcohol abuse is a key contributor to family breakdown and can in turn cause a housing need for young people. • Poverty is also a factor which causes instability.
Actions	• The outworkings of family breakdown need to be considered – this can lead to children moving into care or kinship care.

What did stakeholders say about the indicators?

Youth homelessness: *Number of 16/17 year olds presenting as homeless.*



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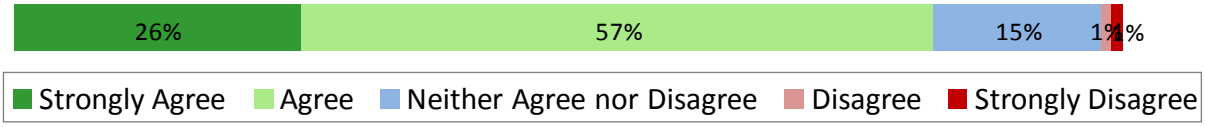
Category of response	Summary themes
Support	• Homelessness can impact all families and all children and young people.
Further expansion/ clarification	• Issues affect children and young people outside the proposed age bracket. Need to consider younger children (and families) and young people 18+. • Also consider the quality of living accommodation – impact of sub-standard housing can be as significant as homelessness.
Problems/ gaps	• Difficult to record accurate data – many young people can be 'sofa-surfing.'
Actions	• Need to consider the number of young people presenting to relevant agencies and their support pathway and end outcomes.
Suggested best practice	• Available data sources from CYPSP.

First time entrants into the criminal justice system: *Number of first time entrants into the criminal justice system.*



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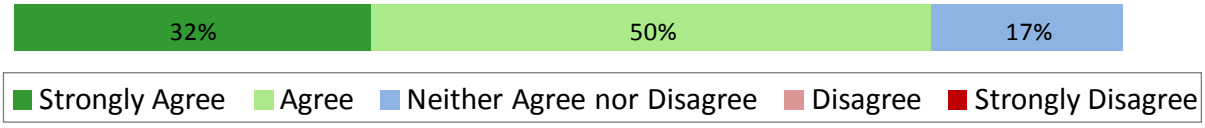
Category of response	Summary themes
Further expansion/ clarification	• This indicator should be used as an opportunity to address inequalities for the full range of Section 75 groups. • Strategy needs to outline how the data will be utilised to inform actions. • Indicator will only measure those entering the criminal justice system and not shed any light on the pathways, risks or reasons prior to this stage. • Indicator does not consider the socio-economic issues at play, which are often beyond the young person's control.
Actions	• There should also be a focus on repeat offenders. The re-offending rate is equally important. • Need to revise our 'reintroduction to society' programmes. • Early intervention vital. • Also need to measure the outcomes for these young people (education, health, contribution, economic etc.)
Suggested best practice	• Councils invest significantly in interventions for children and young people to prevent entry to the criminal justice system and making positive life choices. They are a key partner.

Victims of crime: *Number of young people who are victims of crime.*



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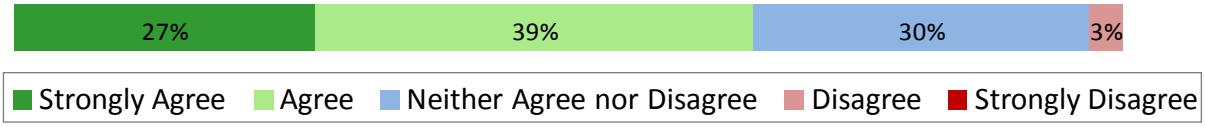
Category of response	Summary themes
Support	• Crimes against children and young people need to be measured.
Further expansion/ clarification	• Helpful to record the number or proportion of children and young people reporting concerns over antisocial behaviour. • Expand to include children and young people who have been affected due to having witnessed a crime, especially in the home.
Problems/ gaps	• Research suggests a large proportion of crime against 12-17yr olds is unreported. • Confidence in policing can be an issue in some areas.
Actions	• Disaggregation of data would contribute to understanding the nature/motivation of the crime and type of crime (physical/sexual assault). • Need to improve confidence/knowledge of young people including how to report crime so they can approach the PSNI. • Crimes involving CSE need to be handled sensitively.
Suggested best practice	• NSPCC regarded as a key partner in this area.

Child contact orders: *Number of repeat applications made.*



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Category of response	Summary themes
Further expansion/ clarification	• Suggest including an indicator which provides a clearer link to early intervention and more positive outcomes. • This is a reactive indicator – action is required sooner.
Problems/ gaps	• Family breakdowns do not always result in contact orders yet can impact greatly on young people. • By the time multiple contact orders have been made, this has had a significant impact on a child or young person. Earlier intervention required.
Actions	• Need a strong focus on mediation.

Additional Comments

Category of response	Summary themes

Support	• Outcome clear links to play. Often children and young people living in difficult circumstances, without safety or stability lack opportunities to enjoy play or leisure.
Further expansion/ clarification	• Need a greater focus on newcomer children and young people who may be vulnerable. • In relation to data development, need to consider 'loss' of relative, rather than 'death' of relative. • Other indicators could include, number of incidents of domestic violence; levels of addiction; number of homes with members living with mental ill health; and number of hate crimes. • Need a greater focus on sectarianism. • The IEF has carried out public engagement events and has been working to develop a mechanism to audit communities' views of the education system.
Problems/ gaps	• CSE is a key area that needs sustained action, requiring regular review and monitoring of risk. • Children and young people with disabilities are more vulnerable to violence, bullying and exploitation. • Need for improved data collection and data sharing between Government departments, statutory bodies and CVS organisations to better understand challenges faced by marginalised young people. • Many key performance indicators are under-developed and insufficient to allow collection of comprehensive and accurate data on the specific problems identified.
Actions	• Need further training on ASD for professionals (e.g. PSNI, Social Services) dealing with at risk young people. • Support for at-risk families, as a whole, is required - especially families experiencing poverty. • Community engagement is key to bringing people together. • Communication is important, especially for vulnerable young people. • Children and young people need to be supported to develop resilience.
Suggested best practice	• Counselling in schools is an important service to help children and young people going through difficult circumstances at home. • The findings of the Marshall Report on CSE in NI should be considered. • Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE) research, such as the CYPSP/QUB study[10], would be a relevant reference point. • Reference to existing guidance for parents re: internet safety. • Policing and Community Safety Partnerships are key partners in this area.

What did children and young people say?

Children and young people identified a range of issues that can cause them to feel vulnerable and insecure. The concept of safety and stability in the home, at school and in their communities, all presented different challenges. The prevalence of cyber bullying and its impact on the mental health of young people was a particular concern, and they agreed that more effort was needed to support them, and develop their skills and knowledge to stay safe online.

[10] http://www.cypsp.hscni.net/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Workshop-6-John-Devaney-QUB-Understanding-the-contributions-of-Universities-to-ACES.pdf

Children and young people also identified key themes in relation to safety and stability which are outlined below:

Key Themes	Comments made by children and young people
Bullying	• *'Imagine feeling afraid all the time you're in school - and, like, you have to go – every day.'* • *'Parents haven't a clue about cyber bullying.'* • Need to develop a wide range of ways in which children can report if worried about anything.
Homelessness	• *'Nobody should be homeless.'*
LGB&T issues	• Policy makers need to be aware of LGB&T issues.
Parents	• More direct action is needed for children with abusive parents. • Personal safety classes be offered in schools/youth clubs.
Infrastructure	• *'Need more safe plays areas.'* • *'Need more safety cameras in school and around town.'* • *'There are lots of police stations to keep us safe.'*
Community Initiatives	• Community projects needed to appeal to a range of people to bring communities together.
Paramilitary Activity	• Need to remove paramilitaries to create safer communities. • PSNI should be more involved, and provide a quicker response.
Juvenile Justice Centre	• *'Need longer phone calls, better TV, not being locked in room at night.'* • *'Less access to drugs, less hassle from police.*
Support for Disabled children and young people	• Person-centred disability awareness training should be delivered to help young people feel safer.
Living in Rural or Border Areas	• Lack of clarity around access to emergency services in a crisis - lines of responsibility are unclear. • Lack of public transport can compromise safety.

What did parents/guardians say?

Parents who took part in the consultation felt that the outcome is aspirational. Some questioned why victims of all forms of abuse were not taken into account and some suggested that the judicial system in NI be reviewed.

Many parents were concerned about the potential for CSE via online platforms, suggesting that a measure relating to this issue should be inserted, along with the provision of training around technology and child exploitation for parents. It was suggested that measures should consider levels of abuse, numbers of victims of physical/sexual abuse and recorded incidences of bullying.

The importance of early intervention as a key to preventing crimes against children and young people was highlighted.

It was also suggested that more education on drugs/alcohol/technology etc. should be made available to children at an early age to raise their awareness of the issues involved:

'*Educate children at around 9/10 years old. Not all are streetwise and know what is going on, and they can succumb to peer pressure.'*

The issue of paramilitarism was also raised. It was felt that people's tolerance of violence had increased in certain areas - where communities believe it is acceptable to punish crime with violence and it was suggested that the PSNI and public prosecution service should take more responsibility.

'*There is mistrust in the PSNI, especially in nationalist areas. When people phone to report a crime they are asked more about themselves than about the crime.'*

The indicator relating to youth homelessness was challenged, and a suggestion made that parental homelessness (with the negative impacts it has on children and young people involved) should also be measured, with early intervention support provided to those families at risk of homelessness. It was also suggested that many parents can face homelessness due to financial pressures and benefit cuts. This, in turn, can lead to children being asked to leave the family home.

Key Points

Key points raised during consultation in relation to safety and stability include:

- The absence of safety and stability in a child's life has a **profound impact into adolescence and adulthood** – transcending this outcome and impacting on each aspect of their well-being. Many young people can face multiple barriers to safety and stability and can be particularly vulnerable to abuse.
- Need to specifically consider the **impact of physical and sexual abuse.**

- Should consider expanding the youth homelessness indicator to a broader age group and/or **family homelessness**.
- **Early intervention and prevention is vital** but support also needed for children and young people who suffer **abuse or trauma**.
- **Youth homelessness will be difficult to accurately measure** given the high numbers of 'hidden homeless' who may 'sofa-surf' or live in temporary, sub-standard accommodation. The definition will be important.
- Important that a **preventative approach to homelessness** is taken with training/ awareness raising in schools/other settings and a targeted approach taken for those at risk.
- Consider the **pathways/outcomes for children and young people after they leave the youth justice system** – an indicator could be developed to capture this information.
- Broader set of indicators may be helpful with a **greater focus on looked after children, children and young people leaving the youth justice system** and self-reported information from children and young people on perceived safety and stability. Indicators on **road safety, CSE, paramilitarism and separated children could also be considered.**
- The **impact and threat of paramilitarism remains a real issue** in certain areas. Important young people can seek help and have the aspiration to avoid criminal activity.
- A number of **UN concluding observations** (such as those relating to CSE; use of secure accommodation; use of Tasers against children; paramilitarism) would be relevant to this outcome area.
- **Critical that looked after children have the same developmental opportunities** as others in their peer group – complex circumstances mean a **multi-agency approach** is required.
- **Internet safety is a major issue**. This includes cyber-bullying, exposure to inappropriate images and the impact on self-image. **Children and young people need education** about how to stay safe online and **parents need support** about how to protect their children.
- Consider children and young people living with **parents with mental illness** and how this impacts on the well-being of the child.
- **Disaggregation of crime statistics** could identify the children and young people most vulnerable to crime; the different motives linked to assault or abuse; and different types of crime inflicted on children and young people.
- **Indicator linked to family breakdown may need more thought**. Some consultees questioned whether the child contact order approach is appropriate

Economic and Environmental Well-being

What was proposed?

The outcome proposed was that *all children and young people experience economic and environmental well-being.*

The areas of greatest effort identified were:

- ***Families experiencing poverty***
- ***Children and young people in need of education, employment or training***
- ***Rural young people***

The headline indicators proposed were:

- **Child poverty**: Percentage of children living in absolute poverty before housing costs.
- **Number of young people in need of education, employment or training**: Number of young people in need of education, employment or training.

The advice of the Children's Commissioner

Key points made by NICCY in response to consultation are as follows:

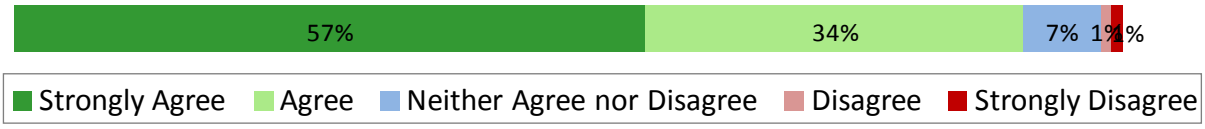
Many of the key areas regarding economic well-being have been addressed. However, while the focus is on child poverty, this is recognised as being experienced due to living in a household on a low income, and actions taken to increase family incomes generally may be more appropriate for a general Poverty Strategy. The Strategy should address costs associated with children accessing their rights to play, education, health, etc. and the inequalities experienced by economically disadvantaged children in relation to these.

Use of the 'Child poverty' indicator is not appropriate as the relative poverty measure is widely accepted as being the most meaningful single measure. All four measures identified in the Child Poverty Act 2010 should be included under this outcome, and indicators under each of the other outcomes should be disaggregated to identify where children in poverty are experiencing less favourable outcomes, for example in relation to education and health.

The Strategy does not provide a clear plan as to how Environmental Well-being will be addressed - more work should be done with children and young people to consider what should be included. Measures of environmental wellbeing should include general measures of pollution, for example air quality; and be informed by paragraphs 67 and 68 of the 2016 UNCRC Concluding Observations (which highlighted the impact of air pollution on children's health). The NI Executive should make a clear commitment, along with appropriate resources, to reduce air pollution, especially in areas near schools and residential areas; and place children's rights at the centre of a climate change strategy.

What did stakeholders say about the areas of greatest effort?

Families experiencing poverty: *By helping families living in poverty, children and young people affected can experience a range of better outcomes.*



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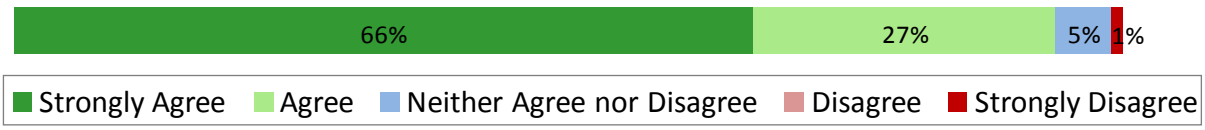
Category of response	Summary themes
Support	• Increasing numbers of children and young people are living in poverty due to benefit cuts and low wages. This is particularly relevant in rural areas where quality, accessible and affordable childcare is not available. • Education has a key role in reducing poverty and equipping children to play a meaningful role in society. The costs of education are significant – uniforms, sports kit, transport etc. • Important that support is available to families. • Children and young people should be protected from the worst effects of poverty. • Children and young people should be provided with life skills to ensure they are economically active in adulthood.
Further expansion/ clarification	• Need to recognise and provide support for those families experiencing 'in work poverty'. • Strategy should consider the costs associated with children accessing their general rights, i.e. the costs of play, education and healthcare etc.
Problems/ gaps	• Childcare is very expensive, and can prevent parents from entering employment. • Closure of community centres, playgroups, after school clubs, homework clubs etc. has a significant impact on parents who are '*juggling employment'*. • Welfare reform a major concern - could make things worse for those already struggling.
Actions	• *'Sure Start's a very important service – should be expanded and receive more funding.'* • Need clear accountability measures for the eradication of child poverty. • Progressive revenue raising measures are required. • Need to highlight support available to parents. • Affordable childcare, accessible employment, new training opportunities and targeted benefits for those unable to work. • The Strategy needs to establish a clear links to relevant Executive Strategies including the Industrial Strategy and Social Strategy, and the Child Poverty Strategy.
Suggested best practice	• School breakfast clubs give children a healthy start and allow parents to increase their hours in work. • Consumer Council has developed a range of practical resources to help families who are experiencing poverty.

Children and young people in need of education, employment or training (NEET): *Children and young people should have opportunities to develop appropriate skills so they can become economically active, find gainful employment and avoid poverty.*



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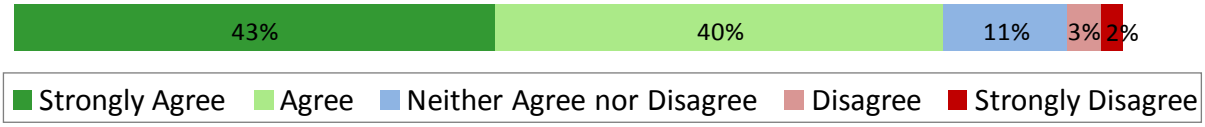
Category of response	Summary themes
Support	• Education and poverty are inextricably linked – paramount that children and young people have opportunities to develop skills to improve life chances. • Crucial that everybody is given the support, encouragement and opportunities to overcome barriers to avail of training and education.
Further expansion/ clarification	• Needs to be a focused approach in those communities which are disaffected. • Care leavers need support to the age of 25 years. • Poor school attendance is an issue and can be a pre-cursor to being NEET • Need a greater focus on transition periods. • Disaggregated data would help identify groups of children and young people who are most vulnerable.
Problems/ gaps	• Range of 'hard to reach' groups where this issue is prevalent e.g. looked after children – need more support • Corporate parents and departments need to co-operate to remove obstacles to employment. • Lack of accessible or affordable transport can be a barrier for children with disabilities. • Important that there is an emphasis on assisting children and young people to transition from education to employment, training or education – especially when leaving the care system or for children with a disability.
Actions	• Need a greater focus on technical or vocational education, alongside academic provision. • Need for a tailored approach linked to emerging business needs and relevant Executive and other strategies. • Schools to engage with Careers Service particularly for looked after children and children and young people with special educational needs. • Need a uniform approach across schools in relation to pre-employment support – providing consistent guidance on all options available. • Re-integration of young people leaving custody should be prioritised. • Need to provide a broad and balanced curriculum adapted to the needs of all learners to ensure young people can transition from education to employment. • Barriers to education, training and employment for some children and young people can be immense, complex and multiple, and need to be addressed.
Suggested best practice	• Community Plans are a vehicle for Departments, Councils and other organisations to work in partnership to increase employability skills. • Prince's Trust gives young people the practical and financial support to stabilise their lives and progress to education, employment or training. • Extern Pathways Project has supported young people to transition to further education, employment or training.

Rural young people: *Children and young people living in rural areas often face additional challenges in the area of economic well-being. There may be fewer employment opportunities and they may have to travel further to access education, training or employment.*



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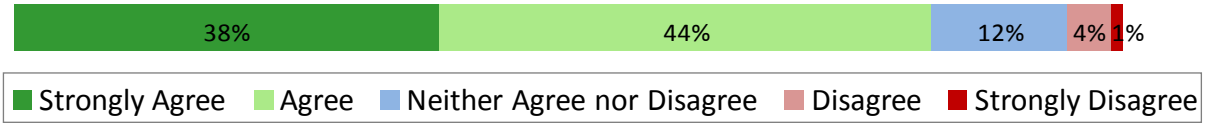
Category of response	Summary themes
Support	• Important that efforts are made to assist rural communities and reduce disadvantage. • Agree that children and young people in rural areas often face additional challenges in the area of economic well-being.
Further expansion/ clarification	• Important to disaggregate data to identify which sub groups are particularly marginalised.
Problems/ gaps	• Rural young people can face social exclusion and marginalisation. • Perhaps other marginalised groups could make the same claim and require more support than rural young people? • Isolation caused by lack of transport or poverty can have a wider impact. • Poverty is often hidden.
Actions	• Affordable access to a good public transport service. • Greater access to youth organisations/activities. • Ensure creative approaches to education planning and delivery to ensure diverse needs are met. • Need great connectivity in terms of internet/broadband access.
Suggested best practice	• Rural extended school clustering to help plan for training opportunities, better use of on-line or virtual learning environments. • Potential to learn from other countries that face similar challenges.

What did stakeholders say about the indicators?

Child poverty: *Percentage of children living in absolute poverty before housing costs.*



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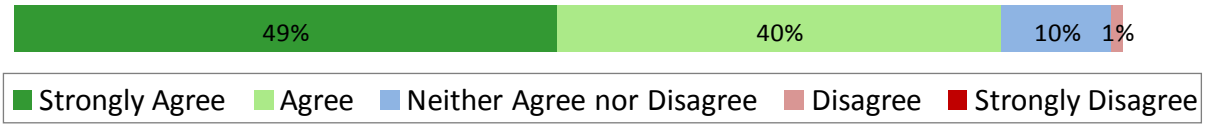
Category of response	Summary themes
Support	• Employment is the key mechanism to remove people from poverty – employability and skills initiatives important.

Further expansion/ clarification	• An additional indicator should be included to track the impact of economic deprivation on the well-being of children and young people. • Important that measures are consistent with Child Poverty Act. • Recommend the inclusion of data on persistent child poverty. • Need to consider the working poor, and monitor the % of households where one adult works yet the household is in poverty. • Absolute poverty is a subset of a much wider population group experiencing relative poverty. Should consider both absolute and relative poverty. • Disaggregation of data would be helpful to understand what groups of children and young people are in greater risk of being in poverty and the impact on the wider outcomes.
Problems/ gaps	• While there are many ways to measure poverty much can remain hidden. • Welfare reform will have an impact – how will this be monitored?
Actions	• Persistent inequality, deprivation and poverty go hand in hand with deprived wards – need a collaborative approach to target most in need. • Need to promote in-work benefits. • Promote the implementation of family-friendly and flexible working patterns by employers. • Place-based solution required – based on coordinated working and a long term vision, rather than a regional 'one size fits all' approach.
Suggested best practice	• Need to link with the Child Poverty Act and Child Poverty Strategy.

Number of young people not in education, employment or training: *Number of 16-24 year olds not in education, employment or training (NEET).*



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Category of response	Summary themes
Support	• Important indicator which will refocus efforts on reducing the number of young people who are NEET - although the trend data demonstrates a reduction, the figure is still too high.
Further expansion/ clarification	• Length of time in employment or training should be considered – may demonstrate where effort is needed to nurture and mentor young people. • May be useful to extrapolate data for different age groups. • Information should be disaggregated to show which groups are most at risk.
Problems/ gaps	• The indicator will only record those who are NEET at a single point of time – need to tackle the issue of young people who are persistently identified as NEET or who cannot sustain a place in education, employment or training. • Some parts of youth population will be disproportionately represented here (children in care, care leavers, poorer households, young carers, young offenders etc.)
Actions	• Need projects focused on improving employment prospects, mentoring programmes and provision of work experience.

	• Partnership between higher and further education, regional colleges and enterprise agencies is vital.
Suggested best practice	• The *Together: Building a United Community* (T:BUC) Engagement Forum have considered this issue at a youth focused event and a key message was the development of a joined up system that offers assistance to young people who are in need of employment, education or training.

Additional Comments

Category of response	Summary themes
Support	• The need for some parents to work long hours means they miss out on spending time with their children which can impact on their development and family relationships. • Priorities identified by children and young people relating to the environment include – green spaces, open spaces, clean and safe environments, liveable and connected communities, reduced traffic. • Important that respect and understanding of environmental issues is instilled at an early age, and opportunities provided to explore green spaces. • Some children and young people have a greater appreciation and understanding of issues such as pollution, climate change, recycling or waste management than adults. • Children and young people are interested in environmental issues and the influence they can have on older generations. • Benefits of the natural environment have been overlooked in the Strategy. • Children and young people should be able to experience environmental wellbeing – healthy ecosystems, biodiversity, protection from pollution, quality natural spaces etc.
Further expansion/ clarification	• Given the importance of affordable childcare, consider the need for a specific indicator in this area, such as % income spent on childcare. • Need to consider the impact of community interface barriers on the environment in which our children and young people live and the targets relating to their removal. • Strategy does not provide a clear plan as to how environmental well-being will be addressed. • Rather than have a clean environment 'provided' for them, children and young people must garner value from it, requiring them to respect and contribute to/nourish it – this aligns the with 'Making a positive contribution' outcome. • Economic and environmental interdependence should be acknowledged rather than be treated under separate headings. • Suggest an indicator about access and interaction with natural environment at home/school/in daily activities and for the quality of the environment e.g. minutes/distance to accessible open space.
Problems/ gaps	• No indicator in relation to environmental well-being - an important area that needs to be addressed. • The quality of the physical environment has a fundamental impact on other aspects of societal well-being. • Teenagers need early and effective careers advice. • If the two strands of economic and environmental wellbeing are to be considered in a single outcome, they should be equally weighted.

	• Whilst poverty is measured financially, having a standard of living adequate for physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development is not solely an economic matter – it is a combination and balance of environmental, social, cultural and economic factors.
Actions	• Children should be taught issues linked to the environment and sustainability i.e. where their food comes from. • Should develop and deliver a 'Healthy Towns and Villages' initiative. • Environment is a key issue for young people – consider the development of increased cycle lanes, footways and footpaths. • Curriculum could be used to promote important issues linked to social justice and respect for the environment. • Actions should, in all cases mention environmental matters – including children and young people's access to, interaction with, and instilled respect for, the natural environment and its quality. • Need to think of innovative ways to make better use of green spaces.
Suggested best practice	• Economic and environmental well-being make up two of the three strategic pillars which have informed development of Community Plans and are key priorities for Community Planning Partnerships. • The Community Relations Council (CRC) has produced a number of publications relating to physical barriers and rural contested spaces. • The English National Planning Policy framework acknowledges that our environment is integral to our sustainable health and quality of life.

What did children and young people say?

While children and young people who participated in the consultation identified a number of concerns with this outcome, many supported the strategic focus on families experiencing poverty, and lack of job opportunities and/or training as key areas that can impact negatively across every aspect of a young person's life. It is clear from the consultation that children and young people feel passionate about the environment and many expressed their concern about the lack of environmental conscience displayed by adults.

Some of the key themes and an overview of the messages from children and young people in relation to economic and environmental well-being are outlined below:

Key Themes	Comments made by children and young people
Poverty	• Most housing estates are under-privileged. • '*Young people who don't have the right stuff get bullied and picked on – this can lead to mental health issues.*' • *'Some kids don't get breakfast in the morning because their parents haven't got the money.'* • There is a focus on words and not actions. The question is <u>how</u> to reduce poverty, make the economy stronger and protect the environment.

Job Opportunities and Employment	• *'Parents work too long hours and don't spend enough time with us.'* • *'If you can't afford to get the things you need to support your education it can affect your chances of getting a job.'* • *'Employers need to pay a living wage.'* • Need more jobs for young people.
Rural areas	• Lack of services, transport in rural areas and low prioritisation of rural people. • *'Young carers find travelling a big issue when they have a chance for a break.'*
Training and Skills Development	• More skills training is needed to help young people get jobs. • Apprenticeships are a good idea. • Need volunteering and work experience opportunities. • *'Money budgeting courses from secondary school need to be a compulsory part of the curriculum.'*
Children and young people with a disability	• *'[Need] more youth clubs closer to where young people with disabilities live.'* • The cost of accessible transport for young people with disabilities can be a barrier to them enjoying life and socialising with friends.
Environmental Well being	• Some children and young people suggested that the environment isn't an issue that young people take seriously. • *I am concerned about the rainforest.'* • *'I am concerned for animal safety.'* • *'Adults should know about the impact they have on the planet.'*

What did parents/guardians say?

Parents and guardians who took part in the consultation requested that the Strategy provide a clear definition of poverty (particularly in relation to indicators), suggesting that this also include the number of children and young people experiencing an appropriate standard of care and living conditions. It was suggested that there should be a focus on the number of 'working poor' - those who work but are 'living on the bread line'/'just about managing'. It was also suggested that the NI Executive partner with the benefit system to access its statistics to identify the number of families claiming benefits, and to help target these families for support so it does not become a continuous cycle.

'The Executive should look at children and young people who are carers and money [should] be made available for respite to ensure they have a childhood.'

The issue of education and training was also raised and it was suggested that young people should stay in school until they are 18 years old, and then attend a training scheme such as an apprenticeship until they are 24 years old. This would enable them to gain a trade before deciding on academia and a career path. Some parents also voiced concerns about Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA), suggesting that it should be provided to all children and young people rather than being means tested.

Parents were concerned about their children's futures, both in terms of gaining suitable qualifications and quality employment. They also reflected on how limited opportunities may lead to their children moving away from NI for better prospects.

Further points raised by parents included:

- Concerns about the number of young people who have employment which is low paid or involves a zero hours contract;
- The need for schools to raise awareness of the potential for leavers to gain apprenticeships;
- The impact of the cost of childcare, which can reduce the incentive to work; and
- Concerns about *Sure Start* provision being based on postcode, meaning that families who need help many not be able to access it.

Key Points

Some of key points made during the consultation in relation to economic and environmental wellbeing include:

- **Environmental wellbeing needs greater prominence** in the final Strategy with accompanying relevant indicator(s). Issues such as **air quality, respect for environment, access to green space, environmental health** could be considered.
- **Child poverty, and poverty in general, is a persistent problem** that impacts on a range of other outcome areas.
- Need to consider **appropriateness of the child poverty indicator** and whether it should be expanded or supplemented.
- The **costs associated with fundamental rights needs to be considered** and monitored e.g. the cost of education, healthcare, and play. The **costs associated with education are significant** - parents need more information on support available.
- **Welfare reform is a major concern** and its impact on the well-being of children and young people needs to be considered and, if possible, measured.
- It is suggested that more and more families are suffering from **'in-work poverty'**. Services such as *Sure Start* are seen as important and some respondents suggest they should be supported and expanded.
- **Affordable, accessible, appropriate and quality childcare is fundamental if parents take up employment.** Employers also need to provide a level of flexibility for parents trying to juggle the challenges of work and young children.
- There is a need for **support to be made available to young people when transitioning from secondary education to further education, employment or**

training to ensure they understand the options available to them. Important that schools, colleges, careers service etc. work together.

- **Prolonged periods of being outside of education, employment and training has a significant and long-lasting impact on well-being** – being unable to *remain* in education, employment or training for a length of time is also a significant concern.
- **Rural transport is a significant barrier** to accessing employment, training or education and can also lead to a level of social exclusion/isolation.
- **Disaggregation of data** on young people in need of education, employment or training would help to identify which areas require most intervention.

Positive Contribution to Society

What was proposed?

The outcome proposed was that *all children and young people make a positive contribution to society.*

The areas of greatest effort identified were:

- ***Youth Work***
- ***Seldom heard voices of young people***

The headline indicators proposed were:

- **Participation**: Frequency of participation in voluntary and community work
- **Self-efficacy**: Measure the confidence and capability of young people through self-efficacy

The advice of the Children's Commissioner

Key points made by NICCY in response to consultation are as follows:

The section provides a useful overview of some of the key issues relating to children and young people's right to have a say in decisions affecting them, such as services, schools and community planning, as recognised under Article 12 of the UNCRC. The Strategy should also seek to provide opportunities for children and young people to volunteer within their communities, and give consideration to lowering the voting age to 16.

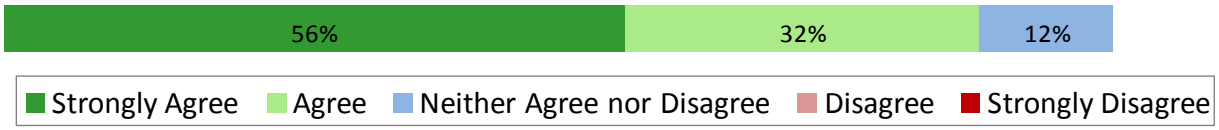
The indicators for this outcome do not link well with the content - there is no indicator for participation in decision-making. The indicator in Outcome 7: *Respect for views; Percentage of young people who feel they have a chance to give their views about the issues that affect them,* should be moved to this outcome. It should be amended to reflect different contexts of decision-making such as whether young people have a chance to provide their views on issues which affect them at home, in school, in their community, when receiving services and/or in Government planning.

The indicator for participation in voluntary and community work should be amended to focus on the availability and quality of opportunities for volunteering, for those young people who want to volunteer. The meaning of the indicator on self-efficacy is not clear.

What did stakeholders say about the areas of greatest effort?

Youth work: *Youth work (through youth organisations and groups) seeks to enable every young person to achieve their full potential, and to particularly support young people who may*

have experienced challenges in their early life. It is essential that the Strategy is flexible and can accommodate vulnerable young people aged 18-25 (aligning with Priorities for Youth[11]).



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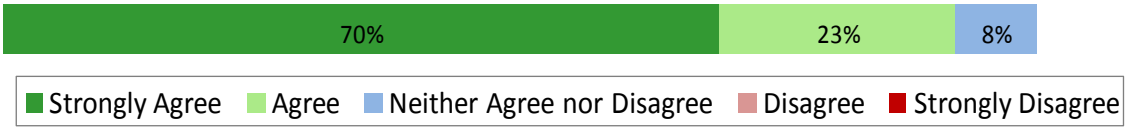
Category of response	Summary themes
Support	• Value of youth work to children and young people recognised, particularly those who may not have encouragement or support at home or who live in rural communities. *'Youth organisations and groups are the bread and butter of youth provision in NI and it is vital that they continue to be supported and resourced by Government appropriately.'* • Youth work engenders a sense of pride for young people in their communities
Further expansion/ clarification	• *'Should include an explicit commitment to strengthen…youth voice.'* • In the definition of youth work, it is important to include youth work delivered through statutory, as well as CVS organisations. • Provides an '*opportunity for community and voluntary led programmes to provide alternative education for these young people'.*
Problems/ gaps	• Helpful for other children's services, such as CAMHS, to have the flexibility to work with young people up to 25, as youth services do. • Barriers exist for children and young people accessing youth services, e.g. transport and costs and children and young people with disabilities or special needs or who are disengaged from the education system experience particular barriers.
Actions	• *More investment'* and *'longer term commitment in youth services from Government'* are required. • More networking support for youth agencies and services. • Need to raise young people's '*awareness of homelessness and develop independence skills'.* • A joined-up approach to the delivery of services is needed. • Providers should '*explore opportunities to share resources and pool funds.*' • Need for improved provision in rural areas. • More adult volunteers required to support youth work.
Suggested Best Practice	• *Learning for Life and Work'* identified as a valuable programme for young people '*showing [them] how they can contribute to society and…encourage them to do community/voluntary work'*.

'Seldom heard' voices of young people: *Participation should be for all children and young people and mechanisms should be put in place to facilitate and actively seek out the voice of young people who are seldom heard.*

[11] Priorities for Youth



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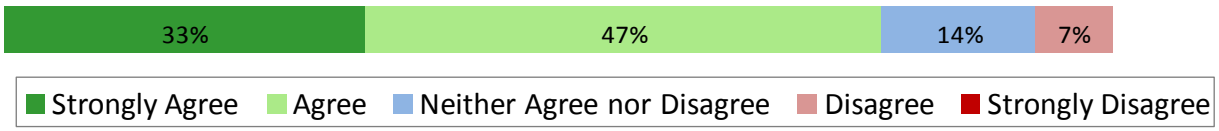
Category of response	Summary themes
Support	• *'Talking to children and parents is essential. Advocacy groups are heard too much.'* • *'Agree with the need to actively encourage and support children and young people to contribute to society and form part of the decision-making process.'*
Further expansion/ clarification	• Proposal that *'children'* also be included in the proposal. • Suggested that ACEs be considered. • More information on participation mechanisms requested.
Problems/ gaps	• Voices of specific children and young people should be actively sought and heard, including children in childcare settings; younger children; those with disabilities; transgender young people; children with language or learning difficulties; and Roma, Traveller and newcomer children and young people.
Actions	• Strategy should '*support and deliver solutions to the problems facing all young people who feel marginalised'.* • Need to '*embed participative structures'* for children and young people. • Important that children's participation is *'a process, rather than an event or a one-off activity*'. • Organisations should provide feedback to children and young people about how their views influenced policy.
Suggested Best Practice	• Reference made to Playboard's Young Researcher Group and its use of *'innovative play based approaches to collect views and perspectives'.*

Participation: *Frequency of participation in voluntary and community work.*



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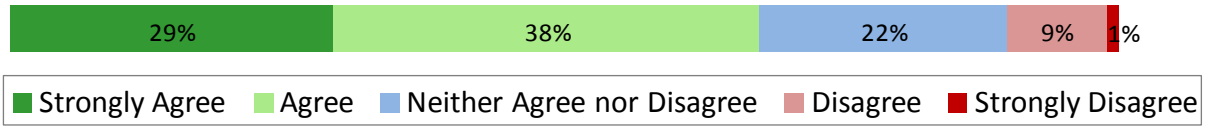
Category of response	Summary themes
Further expansion/ clarification	• Participation impossible to measure – suggest identifying other ways for a young person to make a positive contribution. • Concerns that this measure would not capture young people who are *'furthest away from mainstream provision'* and not at a stage in their own lives where they are able to engage in voluntary and community work. • Need *'a further definition of what constitutes participation'* and more information about how it would be *'operationalised'.*

	• Important to '*measure the impact of participation on the individual'* and benefits of it. • Propose measure would be *'focused interventions with quality outcomes'*.
Problems/ gaps	• Consider *'extending [this indicator] to those who are harder to reach'* and also to include younger children.
Actions	• Should identify ways to *'reflect positive contributions made by children and young people who care for family or participate in community projects.'* • Improve accessibility and transport for young people with disabilities and/or living in rural areas to enable them to participate. • Use social media to support participation and encouraging parents to support their children's participation. • *'Need to make space for young people to volunteer.*'

What did stakeholders say about the indicators?

Self-efficacy: *Measure the confidence and capability of young people through self-efficacy.*



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Category of response	Summary themes
Further expansion/ clarification	• As an indicator, self-efficacy is unclear. Further definition is required. • Not a suitable indicator – complex and difficult to measure. More information required in relation to how data will be collected and used. • Need more information about measurement, operationalisation and monitoring. • Suggest using a *'measure of participation'* or *'baseline measurement'*. • *'A measure of confidence will not directly translate to a positive contribution to society*.'
Problems/ gaps	• A measure requiring verbal communication ability would be unsuitable and potentially discriminatory for children and young people with limited communication skills.
Actions	• *'This is vital, but requires long-term engagement. This is about building the confidence of our young people, and for those young people who are most marginalised, this will take time.'*
Suggested Best Practice	• Student self-assessment tools regarded as effective as they*…'allow students to import learning from outside school such as home language skills, musical ability or sporting aptitudes.'*

Additional Comments

Category of response	Summary themes

Support	• Recognition of the valuable experiences children and young people gain from youth clubs, youth organisations and outdoor education centres. • Important that *'young people…feel they have a stake in wider society and not just feel they have a value or status in one restricted sphere'.*
Further expansion/ clarification	• Question the appropriateness of youth club participation as a measure for '*seldom heard voices'*. • Suggest measuring the number of projects co-designed with children and young people. • Consider social capital and how this outcome will *'build the social capital of children and young people'.*
Problems/ gaps	• Important that all children and young people have opportunities to volunteer and to contribute, particularly younger children and those who have specific health needs, who have smaller networks or who may be regarded as part of a marginalised group or community.
Actions	• Ensure that all children and young people are enabled to participate and that effective measures are designed to monitor the participation of under-represented groups. • Need to design appropriate consultation mechanisms to engage with children and young people. • Ensure community planning engages with children and young people.

What did children and young people say?

Discussions with children and young people focused mostly on their having a voice. While there was a degree of cynicism about the Government expressed in discussion of most outcomes, it was perhaps most apparent in the discussions pertaining to this outcome. The young people who participated in the consultation were energetic and enthusiastic in their comments. Some of the key themes raised include:

Key Themes	Comments made by children and young people
Participation	• *'They say they're going to listen to young people – why aren't they doing it now?'* • *'Politicians don't reach out to us because we don't vote.'* • *'I've never seen something change as a result of a consultation – they don't report back to young people.'* • Beware of tokenism.
Engagement	• *'How can we have a say in Community Planning? Most young people don't know anything about it.'*
Brexit	• *'Young people weren't asked but it will affect our lives the most.'*

Voting Age	• *'You can get married at 16 but you can't vote.'*
Political awareness	• *'Young people need to be taught about politics.'* • *'We need to move away from orange and green politics.'* • *'Our passion is going to waste.'*
School Councils	• *'Schools Councils – no-one takes them seriously."* • *'We have our own School Student Council. We also do work experience within the school and out in the Community.'*
Youth Forums	• *'It's good to be listened to by NICCY – but sometimes it seems that NICCY doesn't have the influence it should have'*

What did parents/guardians say?

Parents commented that the indicators were perhaps a little 'wishy washy' and queried how self-confidence would be measured as self-confidence is subjective and depends to some extent on the individual child or young person.

During discussions about volunteering, parents suggested that a clear definition of volunteering would be helpful. Parents queried how volunteering opportunities would be made available, and suggested that volunteering could be supported in schools with participation work offered within school life. Issues raised in relation to volunteering included the lack of opportunities; the fact that not all young people would benefit from volunteering; and potential cost of implementing a widespread volunteering programme.

The issue of youth forums was also raised, with the suggestion that a youth forum be established in every council area, where children and young people could promote volunteering and community initiatives. It was also suggested that youth clubs could be used to provide training and skills for young people to enable them to become mentors.

Key Points

- Important to bear in mind the **right of children and young people to contribute and participate in decision making** in their communities, schools and public policy which impacts on their lives. This may be through community planning and public consultations.
- Need to ensure children and young people are **engaged in the political process** to enable their voice to be heard and their rights respected. It was suggested that lowering the voting age to 16 would facilitate this.
- Engaging with a range of children and young people, especially those who may be **marginalised**, is vital to the delivery of the Strategy and the development of

policies, programmes and services. Important that engagement is ongoing and that decisions made are explained to children and young people.

- Need to **consider Article 12 of the UNCRC when developing mechanisms to engage with children and young people** and ensure they have an opportunity to contribute positively to society in areas such as policy development. **Concluding Observations on participation structures** are also relevant.
- Consider how the outcome relating to rights is linked to the indicator which measures the percentage of **young people who feel they have been listened to and respected**.
- Ensure that **volunteering opportunities** are valuable and provide children and young people with new experiences and life skills. Further, organisations which provide such opportunities should be supported.
- Measuring the number of children and young people volunteering may not reflect the true nature of how they contribute to society. It is important to also **consider areas of 'volunteering' which may not be recorded**, constructive use of 'free time', participation of those most marginalised etc.
- **Understanding the concept of self-efficacy, and measuring it, is difficult.** If used, it should be clearly explained.
- **Building confidence in children and young people**, and ensuring they are happy and have a wide range of skills, is important.
- Need to **ensure transparency**.
- **Youth work, youth clubs and community groups** are often stretched and under-funded.
- Highlight **lack of access to transport for children and young people in rural areas** to youth clubs and community groups.

Respect for their Rights

What was proposed?

The outcome proposed was *all children and young people live in a society which respects their rights.*

The areas of greatest effort identified were:

- ***Children acting as carers***
- ***Children and young people who suffer from racism***
- ***Children and young people who are lesbian, gay or bisexual***
- ***Children and young people who are transgender***
- ***Children and young people who speak a different language***
- ***Children and young people who seek to practice their faith or do not have faith***

The headline indicators proposed were:

- **Understanding of the UNCRC**: Percentage of young people and percentage of adults who have heard of the UNCRC.
- **Respect for views**: Percentage of young people who feel they have a chance to give their views about the issues that affect them.
- **Negative stereotyping**: Percentage of young people who feel the media represents young people fairly.

The advice of the Children's Commissioner

Key points made by NICCY in response to consultation are as follows:

The emphasis on raising awareness of the UNCRC and the issue of negative stereotyping is welcome. This outcome should focus on introducing the processes which have been recommended by the UNCRC to ensure the realisation and protection of children's rights, such as; a comprehensive national strategy; a high level unit answerable to the head of Government; training and capacity building on children's rights; Child Rights Impact Assessments and evaluation; data collection and analysis; making children visible in budgets; co-operation with civil society; and independent human rights institutions for children.

The section on 'greatest effort' which focuses on groups of children and young people for whom the realisation of their rights is more limited than others, would be better placed under Outcome 8 (Children and young people live in a society in which equality of opportunity and good relations are promoted). Arguably, negative stereotyping could also come under Outcome 8 as this relates to discrimination on the basis of age.

While it is important that children and young people are aware of their rights, the NI Executive also has a responsibility for raising awareness of children's rights among adults, particularly policymakers and professionals providing services to children and parents. Indicators to measure awareness of UNCRC among these groups is suggested.

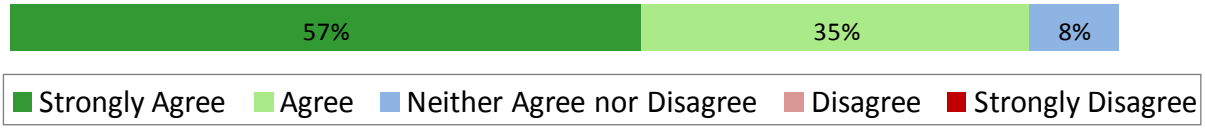
What did stakeholders say about the areas of greatest effort?

Children acting as carers: *Children acting as carers are at risk of missing out on their childhood.*

n=88

Category of response	Summary themes
Support	• Strong support for this as an area where greatest effort is required. • Perception that carers are an under-reported group and are not recognised or rewarded for their contributions. • Regarded as *'disgraceful'* that children and young people are acting as carers today.
Further expansion/ clarification	• Broader definition of the term 'carer' required.
Problems/ gaps	• Challenge for schools to provide support if carer does not disclose role.
Actions	• More support and services required for young carers specifically: funding; respite provision; day facilities; and greater signposting to services. • Call for a Government campaign to raise awareness of young carers. • Need to address the problem of young carers missing learning/play opportunities. • Need to promote greater collaboration across Government departments to improve educational outcomes for young carers. • Proposed audit of the number of young carers.
Suggested Best Practice	• Respondents suggest that 'Mycare' provides information for young carers looking after parents with mental health issues.

Children and young people who suffer from racism: *Children and young people can find themselves subject to direct or indirect discrimination or racism. It is important that these children and young people are aware of their rights and the support to which they are entitled. They require extra protection to prevent negative experiences resulting in negative outcomes.*



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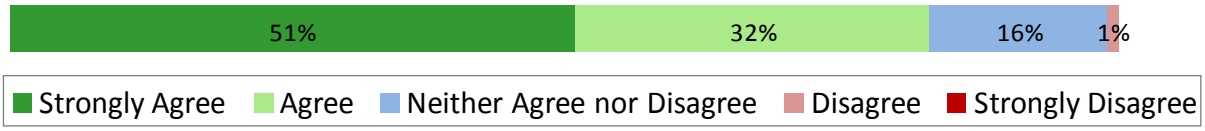
Category of response	Summary themes
Support	• Several respondents identified Travellers as the most disadvantaged group.

	• Others highlighted an increase in ethnic minority populations in NI, and the duty on State Parties to implement UNCRC Article 2.
Further expansion/ clarification	• Proposed expansion of the proposal to include societal attitudes to religion and culture, not simply race.
Actions	• More robust Government response required, including recommendation to reform race equality legislation and reference racial equality strategy. • Services should be culturally appropriate. • Children and young people should be aware of their rights and have access to appropriate support and contacts. • Develop approaches which involve parents in resolving bullying, intimidation and discrimination.

Children and young people who are Lesbian, Gay or Bisexual (LGB): *Lesbian, gay or bisexual young people feel that their rights and awareness of their issues are largely ignored in their education, communities and wider society.*



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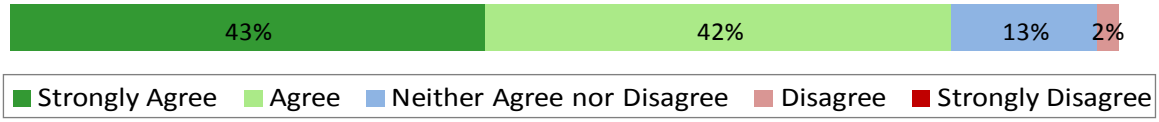
Category of response	Summary themes
Support	• An important issue which is often underreported. • There is a need to prioritise this group of children and young people. • Recognition of damaging impact of inequality and prejudice on children and young people.
Further expansion/ clarification	• The Strategy should reference the Sexual Orientation Equality Strategy.
Actions	• Need for greater awareness of complex issues facing lesbian, gay and bisexual young people. • Proposal that the NI Executive should take strategic action to raise awareness of the range of issues facing lesbian, gay and bisexual young people. • More training required for public sector staff, service providers and community workers. • More appropriate sex education, including education about lesbian, gay and bisexual issues required in schools.

Children and young people who identify as Transgender: *Services need to be flexible in dealing with children and young people who identify as transgender and ensure they do not face discrimination, of any sort, based on their identity.*



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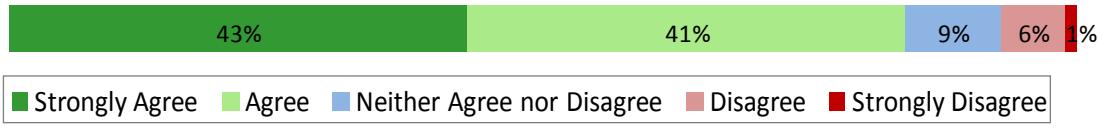
Category of response	Summary themes
Support	• An important area - issues affecting transgender children and young people are often underreported. • Acknowledgment that there is a lack of education and understanding of the issues that affect transgender children and young people. • Concern about high rates of suicide and self-harm amongst young people who are transgender.
Further expansion/ clarification	• More information required regarding measures to be put in place to safeguard transgender children and young people from discrimination. • More information about monitoring required.
Actions	• More research into transgender children and young people's needs and experiences is required. • Greater awareness of relevant issues is required. • Greater flexibility in services is needed. • Perceived need to challenge prejudice. • More supports and measures needed to tackle bullying and monitor bullying incidents. • More effective guidance required for those involved in youth work, education and health services.
Suggested Best Practice	• Services provided through organisations such as *SAIL* identified as good practice.

Children and young people who speak a different language: *Where possible, services should be provided in a range of languages to cater for all children and young people.*



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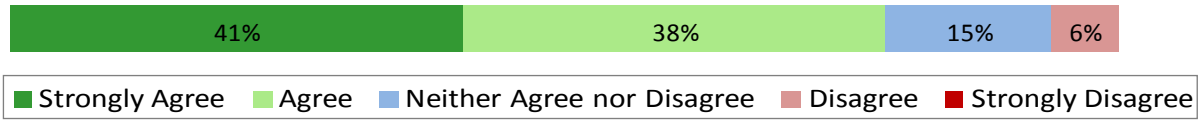
Category of response	Summary themes
Support	• Recognition of importance of all cultures being represented in classroom. • Identified as an important indicator due to increasingly diverse population of NI.
Further expansion/ clarification	• More information required about the funding that will be available to support service provision. • Propose there should be differentiation in language requirements of newcomer children and Irish language speakers.
Problems/ gaps	• Hearing impaired children and young people should be included in the Strategy.
Actions	• Greater support and protection required for newcomer children and young people. • Proposed audit of resources currently available.

	• Further development of professional skills required to support newcomer children and young people. • Further investment required to support smaller services to access interpreter services. • DE should assist schools to use dual language resources to support newcomer children and young people. • Proposed that newcomer children and young people should be taught English rather than accessing a range of services.

Children and young people who seek to practise their faith: *Children and young people who seek to live out their faith in daily life are at risk of not having their fundamental rights respected. This also applies to those children and young people who have no faith and who class themselves as atheist or humanist.*



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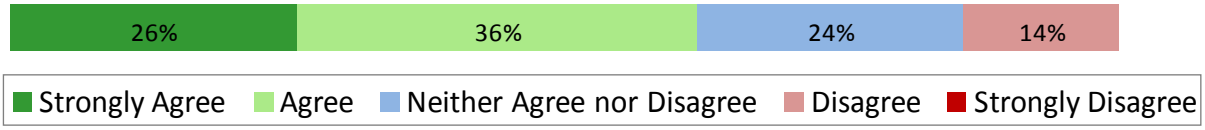
Category of response	Summary themes
Support	• Recognition that everyone has *'right to practice or not practice faith without discrimination' (sic)*
Further expansion/ clarification	• Request for more information about actions to be introduced to support children and young people to practise their faith.
Actions	• Need to promote diversity and encourage inter-cultural integration. • Schools need to be equipped to deal positively with diverse intakes. • Should be greater emphasis on preparation for working in a diverse classroom during teacher training.

What did stakeholders say about the indicators?

Understanding of the UNCRC: *Percentage of young people and percentage of adults who have heard of the UNCRC.*



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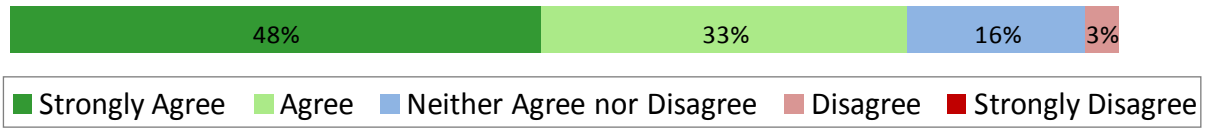
Category of response	Summary themes
Further expansion/ clarification	• Many respondents called for greater clarification/expansion of this indicator. • Call for the indicator to be strengthened to measure children and young people's *understanding* of the UNCRC.

	• Proposal that children and young people should be *'familiar with content', 'have rights upheld'* and the principles of the UNCRC *'should be enacted'.* • Reference to the UNCRPD should be included in the Strategy.
Actions	• Further effort is required across all education sectors to raise awareness of the UNCRC, particularly in relation to listening to the voice of the child. • Suggest a review of education and training available to support dissemination and understanding of the UNCRC. • UNCRC should be embedded in all policies and practices to ensure achievement of the intended outcome. • Need to provide the UNCRC in child and young person-friendly formats.

Respect for views: *Percentage of young people who feel they have a chance to give their views about the issues that affect them.*



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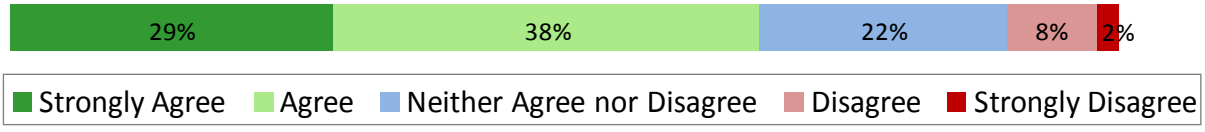
Category of response	Summary themes
Further expansion/ clarification	• Many respondents believe more information is required regarding measurement of the indicator. • More detail is required as to how information will be collected and interpreted, and which issues will be prioritised. • Proposal that the indicator should be strengthened to reflect views not only being heard but also *'taken seriously and responded to'.* • Proposal that the indicator be revised to read: *'...children and young people who have been given a chance, and have actively taken up the opportunity, to participate'.*
Suggested Best Practice	• Review the recently developed 'Respect Index' which is intended to track improvement for all children and young people across Section 75 categories. • Importance of student voice and school councils was highlighted.

Negative stereotyping: *Percentage of young people who feel the media represents young people fairly.*



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Category of response	Summary themes

Further expansion/ clarification	• Additional detail required around indicator, including fuller definition of the term 'media'. • More information required about actions following identification of unfair treatment, and assessment criteria used.
Actions	• Need to have buy-in from media outlets. • Propose that children and young people are supported to tell positive stories through media. • Independent analysis of news articles to ascertain representation of young people proposed as an alternative indicator.

Additional Comments

Respondents proffered a diversity of views in relation to the rights outcome, revisiting or reiterating many of the suggestions they had raised previously:

Category of response	Summary themes
Further expansion/ clarification	• Need to include a focus on younger children. • Need to consider the needs of vulnerable groups of children and young people. • Need to interpret the best interests of the child consistently. • Ensure the outcome framework is consistently linked to children's rights. • Reference other relevant strategies, e.g. racism, disability and sexual orientation strategies. • Address the UNCRC recommendation to end segregation in the NI education system; and the statutory duty to develop integrated education. • Include more references to the availability of funding for the provision of support and services for children and young people. • Highlight domestic violence as an issue where the voices of children and young people should be heard. They should be at the centre of the decision-making process.
Problems/ gaps	• Ensure the rights of specific groups are addressed including parents; children and young people with a disability; children and young people who are carers; and Irish Traveller children and young people.
Actions	• Change government forms to accommodate Irish Travellers. • Address conflict between adult and children's rights and disseminate more information about this. • Consult with children and young people in the design of services. • Ensure parents and families understand children's rights and are aware of their entitlements. • Ensure that reference to the UNCRC is not tokenistic. • Emphasise the NI Executive's duty to promote Article 12 of the UNCRC. • Extend age discrimination legislation to those ages 16 and younger.

What did children and young people say?

Some children and young people who participated in the Strategy consultation appeared disillusioned with Government. Some expressed anger about the Renewable Heat Incentive heating scandal, while others felt that alleged corruption among politicians did not augur well for delivery on children's rights. Some felt that politicians focused too much on the past rather than the present and future. Other children and young people said that politicians could help to address such negative perceptions by engaging with young people more directly, and having a greater presence on social media.

Additional key themes highlighted by children and young people were:

Key Themes	Comments made by children and young people
Awareness	• *'Government should do all it can to make sure that children and young people know about their rights.'* • '[Need to] *develop children and young people's confidence to stand up and say – 'This is my right'.'* • *'Cops don't respect us. You don't see them going up to a forty year old and asking them to empty their pockets.'*
Experiences of Migrant children and young people	• *'I would like to go to school and not get bullied because of what country I come from.'* • *'We need more support when we come from a different country.'* • *'I would like to know more about my rights.'* • *'Government must protect migrants.'*
LGB&T Young People	• There needs to be greater acceptance of children and young people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender.

What did parents/guardians say?

Of those consulted, less than a third had heard of and/or had a limited understanding of child rights or the UNCRC. They suggested that parents, and those who work with children and young people, should be better informed about children and young people's rights, and suggested that strategic measures relating to the UNCRC should focus more on the 'benefit of being aware of the UNCRC' rather than knowledge alone.
One parent commented that the indicators provide only quantitative data, and in recognition of this point others suggested that the indicators need to reflect qualitative outcomes, following the OBA model. Potential indicators suggested included:

- Number of children's authorities that sign up to a charter to verify their service puts children's rights at the centre of their organisation;
- Percentage of children and young people who feel their rights have not been respected – supplemented by information such as when, in what context, and by whom their rights were not respected.

- Percentage of parents with a positive perception of the rights of children and young people.

Some parents questioned how the relevant information on rights would be obtained. Parents expressed concern that children and young people may quote their rights inappropriately and possibly abuse the concept of having rights. Parents commented that respect works both ways and this should be encouraged and promoted. Within schools a 'buddy system' was proposed to encourage children and young people to work together, which in turn could enhance their confidence.

Parents also raised a concern about losing their status as authority figures:

'Sometimes children and young people don't have a voice, and sometimes children and young people have too much of a voice.'

The need to educate parents about children and young people's rights was highlighted, with some consultation participants suggesting that such education could empower parents to develop the confidence and self-esteem of their own children to such an extent that they could stand up for their rights.

'More money should be provided to schools for pastoral care and training provided from outside agencies as this can be too much stress on teachers'.

At least one parent commented about the negative stereotyping of children and young people in the media:

'In deprived areas, the media doesn't respect children and young people. Bad news sells, and you have to fight for a positive story to be heard.

Another parent commented on the UNCRC Concluding Observations, and the UK's position on children's rights:

'There needs to be acknowledgement of the concluding observations of the UNCRC which found that the UK (including NI) is not fully respecting children's rights in specific areas.'

Key Points

Some of the key points made in relation to this outcome include:

- Need to **consider 'rights' in a strategic way** - requiring a comprehensive **national strategy**; a **unit within Government** advising and leading on children and young people's rights; **more training and awareness** about their rights (including Child Rights Impact assessments and evaluation); more transparency on **children's budgets**; and co**-operation** with civil society and independent rights organisations.
- The **NI Executive needs to recognise its responsibility to raise awareness of children and young people's rights among adults, policy makers and service**

deliverers. An indicator on awareness of rights across a range of groups may be useful.

- Need to **collect reliable information** on the numbers of child carers; the number of incidents of racist/homophobic bullying or discrimination; the number of children and young people who are lesbian, gay or bisexual; the number of children and young people who are transgender etc. **More robust data is needed**.
- The **NI Executive should seek to raise awareness** surrounding the above issues (including amongst public sector staff).
- Young people who are discriminated against, or who are marginalised, can **suffer from poor self-esteem, poor mental health or social isolation**.
- The **increasingly diverse population of NI** (in terms of religion, culture and languages), requires that **services are culturally appropriate**.
- The indicator regarding awareness of the UNCRC should be expanded to include **measurement of actions and an assessment as to whether rights actually being respected**.
- **Negative portrayal of young people in the media** should be analysed and, where necessary, challenged.
- The **perceived unfair treatment of children and young people** by police and in shops needs to be addressed.
- There is a need to recognise the **importance of parents as advocates of the rights** of children and young people.

Equality and Good Relations

What was proposed?

The outcome proposed was that *all children and young people live in a society in which equality of opportunity and good relations are promoted.*

The areas of greatest effort identified were:

- ***Children and young people most likely to experience inequality***
- ***Children and young people living in interface areas***

The headline indicators proposed were:

- **Attitudes towards others**: Percentage who are favourable towards Catholics, Protestants and Minority Ethnic Groups.
- **Engagement between young people of different community backgrounds**: Percentage of young people who regularly socialise or play sport with people from a different religious community.
- **Shared spaces**: Percentage of young people who think that leisure centres, libraries and shopping centres in their area are 'shared and open' to both Protestants and Catholics.

The advice of the Children's Commissioner

Key points made by NICCY in response to consultation are as follows:

The outcome has been framed, i.e. focusing on children and young people having improved attitudes towards those from different community backgrounds, in a way that appears to place an obligation on children and young people, rather than on the Government.

This outcome area should be reframed, clearly placing an obligation on the NI Executive to ensure that all children and young people are protected from discrimination of any kind; have access to equality of opportunity across all aspects of their lives; and benefit fully from the promotion of good relations across a range of particular characteristics as detailed in the CSCA.

The section should make reference to children and young people being unable to access equality of opportunity, and their being inadequately supported through good relations duties, which are obligations on Government.

The emphasis on 'fair and equal treatment' fails to set out clearly what is meant by 'equality of opportunity' - which often requires proactive measures to be taken when considering marginalised groups, rather than treating all children as being the same.

The 'greatest effort' section in Outcome 7 (Children and young people live in a society which respects their rights) which focuses on groups of children and young people who experience

discrimination, should be moved to Outcome 8 (Children and young people live in a society in which equality of opportunity and good relations are promoted).

The focus on improving children's and young people's attitudes does not recognise that societal divisions are a legacy of the NI conflict over many decades and states that the NI Executive needs to address the more challenging task of improving good relations between adults, thus making NI a safer and more inclusive place for all children and young people.

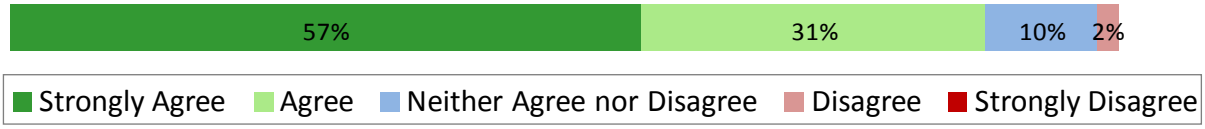
The indicator measuring changes in attitudes to other young people is not appropriate, and suggests that other indicators be developed to explore how young people feel community division impacts on their lives.

In relation to equality of opportunity, similar self-reported indicators could be developed to ask young people whether they feel they enjoy equality of opportunity. The indicators used elsewhere in the Strategy should be disaggregated to monitor how different groups of children and young people are having their rights realised, including their right to enjoyment of equality of opportunity.

It is important to address situations where children and young people are experiencing discrimination due to their age. Actions and child rights indicators relating to negative stereotyping and less favourable access to services are proposed.

What did stakeholders say about the areas of greatest effort?

Children and young people most likely to experience inequality: *Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 lists groups of people that require equality of opportunity. These groups include children and young people. Children and young people of different religious beliefs, political opinions, racial group, sexual orientation; gender; disability etc. should all be treated fairly and equally. They should not feel they are treated unfairly due to their age, and negative perceptions of young people should be tackled.*



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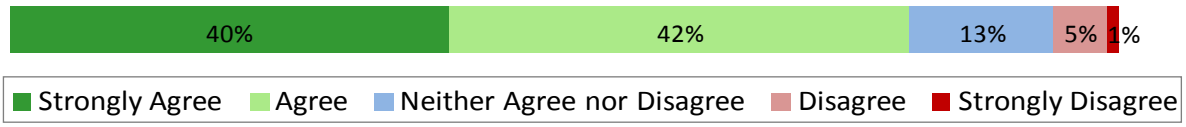
Category of response	Summary themes
Support	• Importance of equal treatment for children and young people alongside adults – treat all Section 75 groups equally. • Necessary to address age discrimination.
Further expansion/ clarification	• Powerful statement but lacking agency. • Include Disability Discrimination Order.
Problems/ gaps	• Perceived unequal treatment of children and young people with a disability. • Include impact of socio-economic deprivation on children and young people.

	• Address educational segregation – ability, gender, access to play and additional education support. • Expand definition of shared education.
Actions	• Ensure equality of outcomes and fairness for all children and young people. • Effective disaggregation of data to monitor Section 75 groups. • Schools should support children and young people to develop positive attitudes and to seek redress where rights are denied. • Shared education should go further than its legal definition to include learning together.

Children and young people living in interface areas: *Children and young people who experience the legacy of the conflict more keenly, and who live in communities with more entrenched attitudes, need greater support to realise the outcome of improved attitudes.*



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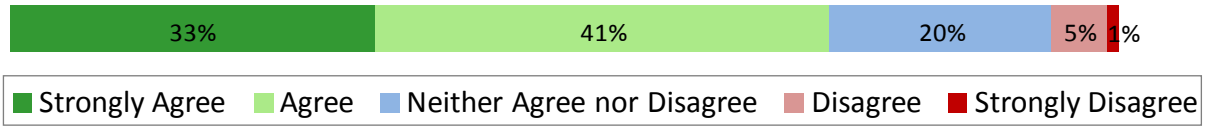
Category of response	Summary themes
Support	• *'Shared space and promoting greater integration are critical levers to eliminating prejudices.'* • Children living in interface areas in urban and rural areas are of concern. • '*Evidence indicates that this is an enduring priority.'*
Further expansion/ clarification	• Include references to mental health support, contested spaces and Peace IV programmes. • Expand the religion indicator to include Section 75 groups. • Important not to label children and young people living in interface areas - unfair to assume they need to improve their attitudes.
Actions	• Use of psycho-educational approaches and programmes to improve family/community communication. • Teach about other religions. • Address association of sport with religious background. • Facilitate integration of migrant children. • Work with parents to address entrenched views. • Need honest, open debate about NI history.
Suggested Best Practice	• Reference useful research into interface issues • Shared education and Peace IV programmes which seek to help children and young people develop positive attitudes to difference.

What did stakeholders say about the indicators?

Attitudes towards others: *Percentage who are favourable towards Catholics, Protestants and Minority Ethnic Groups.*



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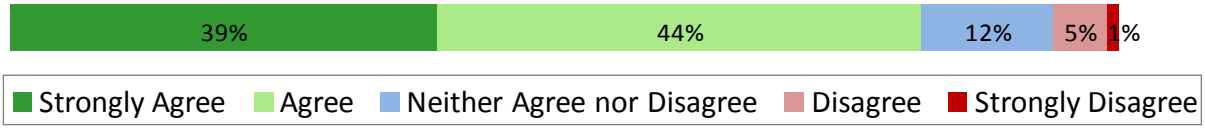
Category of response	Summary themes
Further expansion/ clarification	• Mechanism through which positive attitudes will be developed is not clarified. • More information required in relation to sourcing and collecting robust data. • Suggestion that behaviour rather than attitudes should be measured. • Indicator should track reconciliation across all Section 75 categories. • Proposed new indicator – attitudes towards others. • Promotion of equality and good relations regarded as responsibility of Government. • Suggestion that indicator does not reflect areas of greatest effort required.
Problems/ gaps	• '*Need to address pervasive societal attitudes towards children and young people - not just children's attitudes towards each other*' • Important to address attitudinal change amongst parents/carers.
Actions	• Should acknowledge role of parents, grandparents, carers.
Suggested Best Practice	• Work of EA in supporting diversity and mutual understanding acknowledged.

Engagement between young people of different community backgrounds: *Percentage of young people who regularly socialise or play sport with people from a different religious community*



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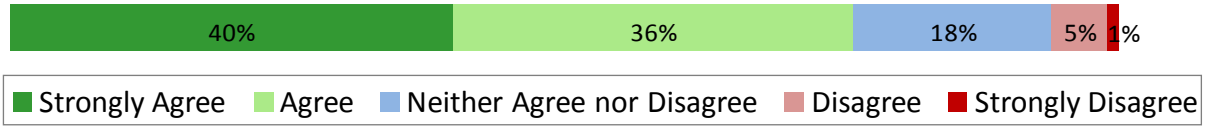
Category of response	Summary themes
Further expansion/ clarification	• All Section 75 categories including minority ethnic groups should be included. • Further definition of aim and data collection methods requested. • Need for a clear action plan to increase opportunities for children and young people to participate in shared activities.
Problems/ gaps	• More work required to take account of increasing numbers of migrant and refugee children and young people.

	• Just because children and young people socialise together does not necessarily mean they will develop understanding or respect for one another.
Actions	• Need to ensure access to integrated education for all parents who select it for their children.
Suggested Best Practice	• Proposed that Peace IV projects should evidence progress towards achieving this indicator. • EA provides support for intercultural, intercommunity play and learning opportunities.

Shared spaces: *Percentage of young people who think that leisure centres, parks, libraries, and shopping centres in their area are 'shared and open' to both Protestants and Catholics.*



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Category of response	Summary themes
Further expansion/ clarification	• '*focus should not be solely on religious acceptance and sharing.'* • Indicator should include all religions, ethnic minority groups and Section 75 groups. • Recommend development of further indicators including resilience, confidence (including dealing with public agencies), and self-esteem. • More information required about how this indicator will be measured and how sufficiently robust data will be collected.
Specific Actions Required	• More frequent area-specific surveys to support council planning for accessible facilities through the area-planning process required. • Quality of engagement between children and young people is critical and must be planned. • Suggested that a whole school approach should be adopted.
Suggested Best Practice	• Reference made to efforts of Belfast City Council to create shared, accessible spaces in the city. • Community Relations Council (CRC) has considerable knowledge and expertise which could be used to support this work.

Additional Comments

Category of response	Summary themes
Support	• Important that Strategy adopts a fully inclusive approach, integrating all Section 75 groups into the proposed outcomes and indicators.
Further expansion/ clarification	• More inclusive outcome recognising all forms of diversity requested. • Strategy should follow Section 75 legislation. • Identify sufficiently robust data which will enable disaggregation across Council areas.

	• Propose inclusion of secondary indicators to reflect all issues related to this outcome. • Include reference to integrated education policy and pupils' positive experiences of integrated education.
Actions	• More sustained, shared educational and leisure opportunities relating to community relations, shared education and shared spaces required. • Note importance of demonstrating benefits of shared education. • Need to take account of specific legislations, including UNCRC/UNCRPD. • More first language classes for newcomer children.
Problems/ gaps	• Needs of specific groups of children and young people should be addressed, including children and young people who are carers or asylum seekers; who are learning or speaking Irish; and LGB&T young people who experience multiple barriers.
Suggested Best Practice	• T:BUC and summer camps recognised as positive activities. • *Media Initiative for Children* (MIFC) *Respecting Difference* Programmes.

What did children and young people say?

Some of the young people who responded said that the Government was a poor role model in terms of equality of opportunity and good relations, as they are ignoring children's rights, particularly LGB&T rights, and refusing to allow LGB people to get married. They suggested that Government need to act as positive role models

Whilst agreeing that young people should not be treated differently i.e. on the grounds of religion, many children and young people who were consulted felt that the concept of good relations under this outcome should be broader.

Key themes raised by children and young people during the consultation include:

Key Themes	Comments made by children and young people
Government	• *'How do they expect us to have good relations when they can barely speak to each other?'* • *'We're the only part of the UK that discriminates against gay people in our laws – they don't treat people as equal.'*
Segregated/ Integrated/Shared Education	• Educational segregation does not promote diversity. • Need opportunities to go to school with people of all different religions and beliefs.
Cross-community youth programmes	• *'It's good when it happens through youth clubs – it's a safe way to do it, but it's not happening enough. There needs to be more money put in.'*

Good Relations	• *'There should be education about racism and other types of discrimination – from a young age – like nursery school.'* • *'We need to know about different religions and what other people believe in – we don't know anything about Muslims except what you see on the news.'*
Refugees	• *'They come here and don't have anyone to fight for them – they need proper services and things like more support in schools.'*
Racism	• *'There are places you can't get into because of the colour of your skin.'* • *'Even small children will call you racist names.'* • '[In some shops] *…. you have to leave your bag and then you're followed round by security – white children have to leave their bags but they're not followed round the shop.'*
Disabled children and young people	• *'Children and young people with disabilities are not treated as individuals or equally in classroom.'*

What did parents/guardians say?

Parents suggested that this outcome is aspirational and queried whether it could be achieved within the timeframe of the Strategy. They said that children and young people are, in general, growing up in a more peaceful time than their parent's generation. It was felt that (in the absence of the negative experiences of previous generations), children and young people perhaps do not have the same prejudices, and their views should be listened to and considered.

The parents who took part in the consultation expressed the view that segregation and sectarianism are still issues, especially in the political context, and in terms of housing and education.

They suggested that outcomes relating to equality of opportunity and good relations will be influenced by parenting styles; the area in which the children and young people live; the schools they attend; and whether they have the opportunity to make friends with children and young people from different backgrounds. They suggested that more integration within the school system, and greater investment and encouragement to promote it, is required.

Parents suggested that, even if schools are not fully integrated, shared learning or engagement could still be promoted e.g. for specific subjects or projects. Some parents were aware of good practice examples where different schools had worked together to promote good relations.

Some parents expressed the view that the teaching of religious studies in school has a negative impact. They suggested that, if religious studies are to be taught, all religions should be given equal prominence in the curriculum.

Parents suggested that equality goes beyond traditional religious divides, and more work needs to be done to accept difference and promote tolerance.

T:BUC was viewed by the parents as an effective and positive intervention. They suggested that such good relations projects should be made available more widely.

With regard to discrimination, parents agreed that children and young people face discrimination in many different ways e.g. non-inclusion or the lack of appropriate services for children and young people with disabilities; and discrimination against children and young people because of where they live; their family background; and their socio-economic status.

Key Points

Some of the key points made in relation to this outcome include:

- The responsibility for improving equality of opportunity and good relations should not be placed on children and young people. Rather, the **NI Executive (and its partners), should ensure children and young people are protected from inequality or discrimination**.
- Further consideration of the **clear link to the outcome which concerns 'respect for rights'**.
- Consider how the **legacy of the NI Conflict still affects the lives of children and young people today**, and how the entrenched attitudes of adults (parents/grandparents etc.) can influence children and young people's attitudes.
- Equality and good relations should be considered within the **context of Section 75**.
- Need for a **more integrated education system** to support the realisation of a more integrated society.
- Need to create **more opportunities for shared spaces and shared experiences** through play, leisure, sport, youth work, volunteering etc., to ensure children and young people from different backgrounds have the opportunity engage with each other.
- Further **indicators on resilience, self-esteem, self-confidence** would be important.
- Suggest conducting **area specific surveys within population level indicators**.
- **Disaggregation of data across all Section 75 groups** would be helpful.
- **T:BUC and the Summer Camp programme** are examples of positive intervention.

Glossary

ACE	Adverse Childhood Experience
ADHD	Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder
ASD	Autism Spectrum Disorder
CAMHS	Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services
CCEA	Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment
CCMS	Council for Catholic Maintained schools
CDI	Child Development Index
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CES	Centre for Effective Services
CRC	Community Relations Council
CSCA	Children's Services Co-operation Act (Northern Ireland) 2015
CSE	Child Sexual Exploitation
CVS	Community and Voluntary sector
CYP	Children and Young People
CYPSP	Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership
DDO	Disability Discrimination (NI) Order (DDO) 2006
DE	Department of Education
DLA	Disability Living Allowance
DoH	Department of Health
EA	Education Authority
EMA	Education Maintenance Allowance
EOTAS	Education Other Than At School
ESL	English as a second language
ETI	Education Training Inspectorate
FGM	Female Genital Mutilation
FSME	Free School Meal Entitlement
GCSE	General Certificate of Secondary Education
GP	General Practitioner
HSCT	Health and Social Care Trust
IEF	Integrated Education Fund
JJC	Juvenile Justice Centre
KLT	Kids' Life and Times Survey
LGB	Lesbian, Gay , Bisexual
LGB&T	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender
MIFC	Media Initiative for Children
NEET	Not in education, employment or training
NICCY	Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People
NI	Northern Ireland
NI Executive	Northern Ireland Executive
NISRA	Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency
NSPCC	National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children
OBA	Outcomes-based Accountability
OFMDFM	The Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister
PfG	Programme for Government

PHA	Public Health Authority
PSNI	Police Service of Northern Ireland
PTA	Parent Teacher Association
RaiSe	Assembly Research and Information Service
SBNI	Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland
SEN	Special Educational Needs
SEND Act	Special Educational Needs and Disability Act
SHSCT	Southern Health and Social Care Trust
T:BUC	Together: Building a United Community
The Strategy	The Children and Young People's Strategy
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UNCRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
UNCRPD	UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
WHO	World Health Organisation
YLT	Young Life and Times Survey
YPBAS	Young Persons' Behaviour and Attitudes Survey

List of Consultees

DE would like to thank the following individuals and organisations who responded to the consultation:

174 Trust
Action for Children
Action Mental Health
Adoption Routes
Adoption UK
Aisling McConvey
Angel Eyes NI
Ards and North Down Borough Council
Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council
Association of School and College Leaders
Autism NI
Ballynahinch Support Group
Barnardo's Northern Ireland
Belfast City Council
Belfast Health and Social Care Trust
Belfast Healthy Cities
Bernard Mulholland
Big Lottery Fund
Boys and Girls Clubs (NI)
British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy
British Deaf Association Northern Ireland
British Psychological Society
Cedar Foundation
Centre for Effective Services
Centre for Global Education
Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership (CYPSP)
Children's Law Centre
Church of Ireland Youth Department
CiNI
Code Monitoring NI
College of Occupational Therapists
Commission for Victims and Survivors
Community Development and Health Network (CDNH)
Community Relations Council
Community Restorative Justice
Conradh na Gaeilge
Consumer Council
Controlled Schools Support Council
Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS)
Council for Nature Conservation and the Countryside
Council for the Homeless NI
Cruse

Customised Training
David and Heather Houston
Derry City & Strabane District Council
Disability Action
Early Years
East Belfast Counselling
Education Authority
Education Authority Youth Services
Employers for Childcare
Equality Commission for Northern Ireland
Extern
Family Fund
Family Mediation NI
Familyworks
Fermanagh and Omagh District Council
Focus – The Identity Trust
Foyle Women's Information Network
Full Service Community Network
Dr Gerry Lynch, RCPSYCH
Health NI
Hill Croft Special School
Home-Start UK
Include Youth
Integrated Education Fund
Landscape Institute for Northern Ireland
Lisburn and Castlereagh Council
MACS NI
Martin Wells
Mencap NI
Mental Health Foundation
Mid and East Antrim Borough Council
Mid Ulster Council
Mindwise
Nadine Darragh
National Association of Head Teachers
National Children's Bureau
National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC)
National Union of Students
NEET Strategy Forum
Newry, Mourne and Down District Council
NIACRO
NI Foster Care
NIPSA
Northern Ireland Childminding Association
Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People (NICCY)
Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education
Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission

Northern Ireland Local Government Association (NILGA)
Northern Ireland Practice Council for Nursing and Midwifery (NIPEC)
Northern Trust
Nurture Group Network
Parent Action
Parenting NI
Participation Network
Playboard NI
Positive Futures
Prince's Trust
Probation Board NI
Prospect
PTA NI
Public Health Agency
Richmond Primary School (Board of Governors)
RNIB NI
Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health
Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists
Rural Community Network
RSPB
SAIL NI
Sarah McGennity
Sara McCracken
Save the Children
Scout Foundation NI
Simon Community
Social Justice Trust
South Belfast Sure Start
South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust
St Peter's Immaculata Youth Centre
Stranmillis University College
Sure Start
T:BUC Engagement Forum
Tools for Solidarity
UNESCO Centre, Ulster University
Unison
Voice of Young People in Care (VOYPIC)
Waterside Theatre
Waterside Women
Western Health and Social Care Trust
Women's Aid Federation
Women's Forum NI
Women's Regional Consortium

DE would particularly like to thank the children and young people who attended consultation events, and those from the following organisations, for their participation during the consultation:

Angel Eyes Youth Club
Barnardos
Barnardo's 6th Sense
Boys and Girls Clubs NI
Education Authority Youth Services
Evolve, Action Mental Health
Foram na nOg
Hill Croft Special School
Home Start
Include Youth
NEET Youth Forum
Network for Youth
NICCY Youth Panel
Northern Ireland Youth Forum
Northern Regional College
School Council, All Children's Controlled Integrated Primary School
South Eastern Regional College
Start 360
STEP Language Club
Toybox project, Early Years
Ulster University
Women's Aid Federation
Woodlands Juvenile Justice Centre
YMCA Ireland
Youth@CLC
Youth Action
Youth Justice Agency

Appendix 1

Parenting NI report

Attached separately

Appendix 2

Participation Network report

Attached separately