

Submission report

Communities and Identities:

1. Individuals residing in Northern Ireland have the right to identify themselves as they see fit.
2. Everyone has the right to avail of any aspect of any culture or community they so chose unless reasonable justification is given for exclusion.
3. Everyone has the right to be nomadic or sedentary and a right to change from one mode of living to another, with mutual respect for/from all communities.
4. The right to an education/ be employed regardless of community/ identity/ background.
5. The right to privacy and the right for adults to access information held on yourself and the right to know who has access to that information.
6. The right to express an unpopular opinion in a peaceful manner.
7. The identity of one group is given special recognition by high powers.
8. All individuals/ groups have the right not to be subjected to violence or intimidation.

Young people and children:

Participation-

1. The right to representation in schools of student body – all ages
2. All young people have the right to participate in the cultural life of Northern Ireland.
3. That the voting age should be reduced to 16 years of age.

Provision-

4. All young people have the right to an acceptable standard of youth service provided without prejudice inc. social events.
5. All young people have the right to an effective education.
6. Young people have the right to access sexual health information, advice and support.
7. Young people should have access to a youth worker based in school while independent of the school.
8. Young people should have access to independent advice where they can air their grievances. This could be organised along the lines of the Citizens Advice Bureau
9. Children should have the right to play without criteria.

10. **Children** and young people under the age of 16 yrs shouldn't have to assume unreasonable adult responsibilities- there should be a strong support system for carers.
11. **Age** at which minimum wage comes into force should be lowered to 16 yrs.

The family

12. **The** state shall provide adequate support and assistance to parents and other primary carers to enable every child in so far as is possible to grow up in a stable and safe caring environment.
13. **The** best interest of the child is paramount
14. **Children** should be consulted on all matters affecting them with adequate independent support.

Submission discussion

Map to Loughry:

This exercise was used to get the group to start thinking about their identities and communities and other symbols of identity that the participants would have seen on their way to the residential centre.

Flags – can be used in a positive way to unite and in a negative way to divide. Some people felt that it should be all or nothing. Should there be dual allowance? Maybe not ban them but should they be limited?

Buildings - certain buildings represent different things for different people, i.e. factories represent working people; leisure centres being cross community – everyone uses them; university – open to all.

American influence – **McDonalds** and **Safeway** on the map represented how much America is involved in the life of NI, and how much they may influence our lives.

Advertising – should advertising of alcohol/cigarettes be allowed near a school? Is there a public interest in banning these advertisements generally?

There was a discussion around achieving a balance between interests of businesses & local culture.

Communities & Identities

1. Discussion on being Irish/British/Northern Irish. Do we have to identify ourselves as this? Depending on circumstances, i.e. holidays – we may identify ourselves as Irish/British instead of Northern Irish – to simplify matters for other people who do not understand the complexities of our cultures.
2. Debate on joining the Orange Order, GAA and similar organisations/clubs. Wording in this section was discussed at length as it was felt that anyone could turn up at any meeting and say that they have the right to be there, even though they would not be welcomed by everyone, so ‘unless reasonable justification is given for exclusion’ was added to cover this. Some felt that this was still an ‘opt-out’ clause for groups excluding individuals. People want to be able to sample parts of other cultures without feeling uneasy – i.e. traditional music, 12th parades etc.

3. Discussion around nomadic lifestyle, different standards of hygiene, different morals and preconceived ideas and prejudices that society has towards people living the nomadic lifestyle. Examples were given where someone who was a traveller wanted to settle and send her daughter to the local school, but were made to feel unwelcome and were not accepted by the community. It was felt that people would be more accommodating if they didn't hold perceptions of hygiene and crime against the travelling community. Local people in turn would be more respectful and helpful towards the travellers. There was also some discussion around 'new age' lifestyle that threatens the traditional travelling lifestyle.
4. Discussion around equality of job applications, and positive discrimination, i.e. two people applying for one job, both equally eligible, i.e. qualifications and experience, but the company needs more women and more Catholics, so that person will get the job.
5. Specific areas/groups of people are targeted for work – this should be equal to everyone, regardless of area. Discussion was not only around Protestant/Catholic but also difference in education/employment opportunities in urban/rural communities.
6. Individuals should be able to access information that credit card companies hold on them. Do they pass this information on to anyone else, if so who? The right to access your own medical records and at what age. Should a parent be allowed access to their children's medical records? What happens when parents are divorced? Do patents have the right not to disclose information of a medical nature to their child, i.e. where the child is seriously ill?
7. Debate around freedom of speech. Some of the group felt that groups such as the far right or fascists should be banned from speaking in public as this **offends** the sensibilities of the public. However the counter argument is that a society that starts to ban particular views will lead eventually to a totalitarian state. For instance who dictates what views should be banned? The group did agree that people should be able to express any view as long as it is in a peaceful manner.
8. No-one group should be given special recognition over others. No-one group of people should feel superior to any other and should not be allowed to exercise power or authority over others.
9. Discussions around people who are members of paramilitary groups – because they are a member of that group should they also be covered by

this – or by being a member of that group are they accepting that punishment etc is maybe part of that membership.

Young people & children

Participation-

1. It was felt by the group that young people cannot be taught about democracy while having little or no say in school policies and procedures. There was unanimous support among the group for teacher/pupil/parent forums in all schools.
2. Discussion around alienation of young people from other cultures, ie supporting particular football teams being able to wear the team shirt etc. It was agreed that if young people had the opportunity to participate in the cultural life of Northern Ireland then there would be greater respect for different cultures in Northern Ireland. A suggestion that young people should be made to participate in various cultural traditions was rejected as this was thought to be draconian with the potential for negative reactions among participants.
3. It was felt that too many 'older' people are making decisions about young people without asking young people what they think. It was noted by the group that elections seldom have the participation of the whole community and that those elected are removed from the ordinary lives of young people in Northern Ireland. It was proposed that the voting age should be dropped to sixteen if you can go out to work and pay tax then surely you should have a say in how those tax pounds are spent. Some in the group felt that sixteen was too young and that what you believe at sixteen is usually different than what you believe at eighteen. The counter argument is that if young people **are** asked for an opinion at sixteen they will then be forced to consider what they believe and therefore have a vested interest in the political and community life of Northern Ireland. A compromise age of seventeen was put forward and a vote was taken. The group voted for sixteen to be included but this was not a unanimous decision.

Provision-

4. Many of the group felt that they had been let down by current youth provision. That in some areas there was no provision or unacceptable provision (not inclusive of the whole community or not **resourced**). Many

of the group felt that if young people were given the right to youth work opportunities in their areas that it would have beneficial impacts on crime and social problems in the communities. On a basic level even if the youth provision was a disco or centre that young people could go to socialise then that would be a start. This was strongly supported by the group.

5. The group felt that this should be included in the Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland. The groups experience was that effective education was not universal and somehow this should be included to give young people a guarantee as good education was sometimes due to geographical location.
6. Debate around what information is appropriate and for which age. Do parents **need** to give their approval? If young people are given this information will they go out and **try** it, i.e. drugs, alcohol, underage sex? Initially this subject came up as 'family planning information for male and female', obviously relating to teenage pregnancy. It was felt that parents would object to this as they might feel it would be encouraging young people to have sex. The type of information was discussed, as was the kind of advice and support. Would contraception be supplied? If someone said something in confidence would parents be involved if it was thought to be serious? What about religious **beliefs**?
7. Discussion around young people not being able to talk to teachers. Difficulty generally around sex education by teachers - pupils and teachers may be embarrassed to discuss it. It was felt that **someone** not associated with the school should be available for young people to talk to. Someone who wouldn't be reporting everything back to the teachers but is totally independent.
8. Where do young people go if they have a grievance about something? CAB advisers tend to be all old people and it was felt that young people would be uncomfortable talking to them. Preferable to have young person/youth worker to talk to – probably set times when they would be available. This to be made known widely, throughout schools etc so that young people can avail of this service.
9. It was felt that everything now is **very** structured, even in primary schools where play is **very** structured. It was felt that young people and children should be allowed to play just for fun and not feel that they have to fulfil some sort of criteria at the end of it, i.e. just playing for the sake of playing – not having someone watch over you assessing what you are doing.

10. Discussion around young people as **carers** within their family unit. Many young people are expected to do their schoolwork and then look after a member or members of their family who are unwell. They are missing out on their own lives, not able to join their friends because they have so many chores to do. Although young people may want to do what they can they should also be allowed to live their own lives – even just taking time to sit and do nothing.

11. It was felt that this should be lowered from 18 to 16 as not everyone stays on at school, and some sixteen year olds are working full-time and should therefore be on the higher wage.

The Family-

12. The group felt that this was a basic right and gained unanimous support.

13. At all times the group felt that the best interests of the child is paramount.

14. The group felt very strongly about this. That young people and children should always be consulted on matters affecting them whether they're legal, medical etc. When consulting the young person or child they should have adequate and independent support. This would ensure as far as possible that the young persons/child's voice is heard.