



RESEARCH PROJECT BRIEF

A COMPARISON OF CHILDREN'S RIGHTS AND WELFARE IN NORTHERN IRELAND WITH THE UN CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

SUMMARY

This brief invites academic institutions and other suitably qualified organisations to respond with proposals for a novel research project. The project's aim is to provide an overview of the state of children's rights and welfare in Northern Ireland, auditing the performance against the framework of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) as a standard. The research should also consider other relevant UN and European human rights standards where these expand on or strongly reinforce the standards contained in the UNCRC.

Respondents are required to state their methodology but it is anticipated this will include a review of available published statistics as well as some form of direct consultation with children. The outcome will provide a benchmark for the newly created office of the Commissioner for Children and Young People for Northern Ireland (NICCY), helping to establish priorities for NICCY's strategic plan. It will also contribute to public debate on the quality of and funding for children's services.

PRINCIPLES

It is imperative that the way this research is carried out reflects the principles of the UNCRC and in particular that it should be non-discriminatory (Article 2) and involve listening to children's views (Article 12)

BACKGROUND

The Commissioner for Children and Young People for Northern Ireland is a new position created by the legislation of the same name that was passed in February 2003. Nigel Williams took office as the first Commissioner on 1st October 2003.¹

¹ For further background on the Commissioner's role and functions see www.niccy.org

The legislation states the Commissioner's principal aim as to "safeguard and promote the rights and best interests of children and young people". In exercising his functions, the legislation requires the Commissioner to have regard to both the "importance of the role of parents in the upbringing and development of their children; and any relevant provisions of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child".

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child was passed in 1989 and came into force on 2 September 1990. It has received the widest support of any UN convention or treaty, with only two countries failing to ratify the convention. The CRC has 54 articles in two parts – the first 41 articles are the substantive part of the convention dealing with rights of children in each area of their lives. The remaining 13 articles deal with procedural matters.

The Convention is overseen by a Committee on the Rights of the Child, which invites countries to submit a report on their progress against the Convention every 5 years. The UK's most recent report was in 2002, and was followed up with an oral hearing with the Committee.

Northern Ireland, whilst mentioned in UK reports, has not had separate consideration against the standard of the CRC, although some NGO's have produced separate comments on this issue.

PURPOSE OF PROJECT

In proposing the present exercise, the Commissioner is anxious to obtain an overview of how children and young people in Northern Ireland are faring in terms of the different rights in the Convention. He wishes to know :

- whether there are particular issues or fields of activity where children's rights are being ignored or underplayed in terms of legal provisions, policy and practice;
- whether there are parts of Northern Ireland (eg district council area, education and library board area, health and social services board or trust area) where children are especially undervalued or underserved on particular issues;
- and how Northern Ireland compares on issues with both the rest of UK and elsewhere in Europe.

The Commissioner also wishes to have advice on issues which should become priorities for his Office, because of their importance and previous lack of progress.

Respondents should take note of the previous comments of the Committee on the Rights of the Child on the situation in UK and Northern Ireland and previous literature on this topic which highlights certain concerns. They should however put such issues in the context of the experience of young people as a whole throughout Northern Ireland.

METHODOLOGY

Respondents to this brief will be able to propose their own methodology for conducting this exercise within the following limitations:

- it will not be possible to engage in primary fieldwork to collect new statistics on service delivery across a range of issues – it is anticipated that research teams will access the very broad range of published statistics available on different services;
- it is essential to include a component of securing the views of children and young people of different ages on their perceptions of the degree of fulfilment of the different articles of the UN convention in Northern Ireland, and the priority areas of their concerns. It is open to respondents to propose how they would achieve this through survey, focus groups or some other format.
- It is also essential to draw on some structured interviews with key agencies in the statutory and voluntary sectors and individuals on different issues. It will be for respondents to suggest how extensive this part of the exercise should be.

On certain issues there is a paucity of published data. Respondents will need to address how they intend to make up for this without undertaking further primary collection of statistics eg how they will confirm or otherwise more anecdotal evidence.

STRUCTURE OF RESEARCH TEAMS

NICCY welcomes proposals that involve interdisciplinary research teams from one or more academic institutions. It is also open to the lead research body to involve voluntary or community organisations and or commercial bodies as part of their research team if they believe this will lead to more effective outcomes.

FORMAT OF RESPONSE

Respondents are required to provide a response in **no more than 10 pages of A4** plus essential appendices. They should include the following details:

- Proposed methodology taking account of the limitations outlined above and explaining the precise approach proposed to collating and analysing data; seeking views of children and young people; and interviews.
- Details of the research team, setting out the background to the lead organisation and any other organisations involved; an appendix providing CVs of the project leader and key research staff; experience of previous similar or relevant research projects on children's issues.

- Proposed timetable for the project showing how the different elements of the data collection, analysis and report writing will be scheduled and allowing for interim monthly reports. **(Any project team proposing to start the project later than January 2004 or proposing a timetable of longer than 9 months is unlikely to be successful)**
- Costs of the study which should be identified separately under the following headings, showing separately staff time (and daily rates) and other costs:
 - Administration
 - Travel and expenses
 - Data Collection of published statistics
 - Assessment of young peoples' views
 - Structured interviews
 - Analysis
 - Report Writing
 - Presentation of Report - (it will be for NICCY to decide on the appropriate method of publication – research teams need only cost the delivery of 20 copies of a word processed and bound report to NICCY along with an electronic copy)

NB The ownership of the research will rest with NICCY as the commissioning body.

SELECTION CRITERIA

Proposals will be assessed against the following criteria:

- Previous experience and expertise of the research team in relevant comparable projects in the field of children's rights or children's service delivery
- Effectiveness of the proposed methodology in securing the desired outcome, especially in securing children and young people's input
- Evidence of ability to manage and deliver the project on time and to budget
- Cost-effectiveness – securing the best report for the most cost-effective price.

SELECTION AND MANAGEMENT PROCESS

This project will be overseen by a small steering group, chaired by the Commissioner for Children and Young People, Nigel Williams. The steering group will include representatives of leading children's organisations and researchers from within the public and voluntary sectors, plus four young people.

This steering group will be responsible for shortlisting respondents, interviewing selected research teams, and selecting the successful research team.

The steering group will also meet with the researchers twice during the project and also receive a presentation on the final draft report.

DEADLINE FOR RESPONSES

Research teams are required to submit three printed copies of their submission by 5pm on **Friday 29th November** in an envelope marked RESEARCH PROJECT to Louise Brady, NICCY, 7th Floor, Lancashire House, 3 Linenhall Street, Belfast BT2 8AA, and one copy by e-mail to louise@niccy.org

It is hoped to invite shortlisted research teams for interview in December or early January.

Enquiries about this brief can be addressed to Nigel Williams by e-mail at nigel@niccy.org

Nigel Williams
Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People
4 November 2003