Existence of a National Strategy on social inclusion

The strategy for promoting the social inclusion of young people, Our Children and Young People: Our Pledge. A ten year strategy for children and young people in Northern Ireland 2006-2016 [1].

The strategy has a number of other publications associated with it which also impact on the social inclusion of young people, including:

- Lifetime opportunities: Government's anti-poverty and social inclusion strategy for Northern Ireland
- Together: Building a United Community.

(See 'Scope and contents' [2] below).

Although this strategy has not yet been replaced, the Department of Education has completed a consultation [3] about its draft Children and Young People's Strategy 2017-2027 [4]. The draft strategy focuses on eight outcomes for children and young people: physical and mental health; play and leisure; learning and achieving; living in safety and stability; economic and environmental wellbeing;
making a positive contribution to society; living in a society which respects their rights; and living in a society which promotes equality of opportunity and good relations are promoted.

Any updates on the Strategy can be found on the Department for Education page.

**Scope and contents**

**Children and Young People's Strategy (2006-2016)**

Published by the Department of Education, *Our Children and Young People: Our Pledge. A ten year strategy for children and young people in Northern Ireland*, intended to cover a ten-year period from 2006 onwards. It outlines challenges and persistent problems experienced by children and young people in Northern Ireland, including increasing levels of child obesity; sectarianism and its impact on mental health; the low uptake of further education; delinquency; and the risk of social exclusion associated with all of these. The strategy covers eight pledges taken by Northern Ireland Executive to tackle these challenges and move towards its vision: a society in which ‘children and young people thrive and look forward with confidence to the future’.

In addition to highlighting actions already taken and due to be taken in light of this vision, the strategy outlines six main areas of focus which serve as an outcomes framework for the strategy as a whole. These are that children and young people are:

1. healthy
2. enjoying, learning and achieving
3. living in safety with stability
4. experiencing economic and environmental well-being
5. contributing positively to community and society
6. living in a society which respects their rights.

The Strategy has a number of other publications associated with it which also impact on the social inclusion of young people, including:

- Lifetime Opportunities: Government's Anti-Poverty and Social Inclusion Strategy for Northern Ireland
- Together: Building a United Community.

See below for more information.
The Strategy covers the period of 2006 to 2016. It has reached its intended time period it covered, but has not yet been replaced. In December 2016, on behalf of the Executive, the Department of Education launched a consultation [3] about its draft Children and Young People's Strategy 2017-2027 [4]. It's aim is ‘to work together to improve the well-being of all children and young people in Northern Ireland - delivering positive long lasting outcomes’. The draft strategy focuses on eight outcomes for children and young people: physical and mental health; play and leisure; learning and achieving; living in safety and stability; economic and environmental wellbeing; making a positive contribution to society; living in a society which respects their rights; and living in a society which promotes equality of opportunity and good relations. For more information, see section ‘Revisions/ Updates [6]’ below, or the article on ‘Current debates and reforms [7]’.

Lifetime Opportunities

Published in 2006, Lifetime Opportunities [8] lists goals for four main strands of the population, as follows:

1. early years (0-4) - ensuring that every child should have a chance to develop their full potential, regardless of social background;

2. children and young people (5-16) - ensuring all children and young people experience a happy childhood, whilst equipping them with the education, skills and experience to achieve their potential;

3. working age adults - ensuring that everyone has the opportunity to fully participate in economic, social and cultural life; and

4. older citizens (beyond working age) - ensuring older people are valued and respected, remain independent, participate as active citizens and enjoy a good quality of life in a safe and shared community.

With regards to children and young people, the strategy highlights the need to concentrate efforts on reducing inequality in the areas of child poverty, financial assets, social capital, discrimination and ill-health in order to promote equality of opportunity and prevent the transmission of social exclusion from one generation to the next. It outlines some of the challenges faced with regards to children and young people and details the actions which have been taken to tackle social exclusion and poverty (see 'Inclusive Programmes for Young People [9]' for more information). Ultimately, the Strategy contributes towards eradicating poverty and social exclusion in Northern Ireland by 2020.

Together: Building a United Community

The Together: Building a United Community [10] strategy, published in 2013, aims to improve community relations by tackling inequality, improving equality of opportunity for all and tackling sectarianism, prejudice and hate. It has four key priorities as follows:

1. children and young people - improving attitudes and building a community in which they can play a full and active role in building good relations
2. shared community - creating a community where all areas are open and accessible to everyone

3. safe community - creating a community where everyone feels safe in moving around

4. cultural expression - creating a community which promotes mutual respect and understanding.

Each of these priorities is supported by a number of underpinning principles, which include inclusion, integration, cohesion, sharing and tolerance.

The strategy outlines a number of programmes and commitments intended to support the above aims and principles. It also established an independent organisation - the Community Relations Council [11] - to provide advice to and challenge all levels of government.

**Responsible authority**

**Children and Young People's Strategy**

The implementation mechanisms established under the 2006-16 plan included:

- The Minister for Children and Young People and Ministerial Sub-Committee on Children and Young People
- A Strategy Planning and Review Group
- A Children and Young People’s Action Plan
- A Parent’s Advisory Group
- A Practitioner’s Group
- A Research and Information Group.

The proposed mechanisms for the 2017-27 plan are set out in Chapter 5 of the draft and include a reconstituted Ministerial Sub-Committee on Children and Young People.

The proposed structures will draw on a 2015 report from the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People (NICCY), Reporting on Best Practice in Cross-Departmental Working Practices for Children and Young People [12].

**Lifetime Opportunities**

The Lifetime Opportunities strategy [8] was produced by the Office for the First Minister and Deputy...
First Minister in conjunction with all other government departments. It recognises the importance of partnership working with social partners and representatives of individuals experiencing poverty or social exclusion is necessary. The mechanisms used to assess the strategy include:

- a Poverty Forum, made up of relevant stakeholder groups, responsible for monitoring progress
- a Central Anti-Poverty Unit (CAPU), established within the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister (OFMDFM - replaced by the NI Executive Office in 2016), responsible for monitoring and evaluating impact
- an inter-departmental Equality and Social Need Steering Group, responsible for coordinating, monitoring and evaluating actions taken by departments and partner agencies
- District Councils, responsible for contributing to meeting anti-poverty and social inclusion targets.

Revisions/Updates

Children and Young People’s Strategy

The Children and Young People's Strategy (2006) lasted for 10 years. In December 2016, the Department of Education launched a consultation on its new draft Children and Young People's Strategy 2017-2027. The consultation closed in March 2017. In September 2018, the Department of Education, published the Consultation on the draft Children and Young People’s Strategy, which will inform the final strategy (see ‘Current debates and reforms’).