

EMAIL

Aoibhinn Treanor
Clerk to Committee for Education
Room 428
Parliament Buildings
Belfast
BT4 3XX

Ref: 24/CJS/CQ/148

24 October 2024

Dear Aoibhinn

Re: RSE Inquiry – further information

Thank you for your letter dated 07 October requesting information following our evidence session for the Committee’s RSE Inquiry relating to faith-based groups and good relations, and how we ensure our Youth Panel is representative.

We welcomed the opportunity to present to the Education Committee on 02 October to give evidence to the Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) Inquiry. Whilst we were asked some questions on RSE, there were a number of occasions where Members focused on the powers and role of the Office, rather than the subject matter, for example, the question in relation to the issuing of press statements by myself and my office bears no relation to the inquiry, or the ability of my Office to represent children and young people and their families.

It was therefore disappointing that the line of questioning pursued, related to my Office, rather than the rights of children and young people, their education and the law.

Additionally, on a number of occasions, I was interrupted whilst trying to give a full answer to a question from a Member, which I did not find appropriate.

Faith and Good Relations

As a public authority, we have a duty to promote equality of opportunities and good relations. Our equality scheme is our commitment to fulfil our Section 75 duties towards people who might experience inequality. We also have equality and diversity-related action plans to make equality central to our policy and decision-making processes.

In relation to examples of our policy and participation work and matters which were raised by a Committee Member, I wish to draw the Committee’s attention to our website and the content relating to our work on Brexit, the 100-year anniversary of NI and on the importance of culture and identity to children and young people. In recognition of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and

children and young people's right to celebrate their culture, NICCY and our Youth Panel looked at the right of the child to explore and celebrate their cultural identity and to recognise the right of others to celebrate theirs as part of the centenary year of NI and good relations week. We released a number of podcasts which Members may wish to listen to, and our Youth Panel agreed a position statement on culture and identity which continues to inform our work.¹

Our policy team continues to engage with other relevant authorities on Brexit and the impact of this on children and young people's rights and our NYP have been involved in discussions and debates over Brexit and EU Withdrawal, including hosting a conference with the OCO in the Republic of Ireland and producing the 'It's Our Brexit Too' Report which was presented to MPs at Westminster. NICCY has also published two reports: 'UK Withdrawal from the EU – Overview of the Potential Impact on Children in Northern Ireland' in 2018 and 'UK Withdrawal from the EU – 'Brexit' in 2020.²

Furthermore, NICCY works with, and on behalf of, children from across a wide range of backgrounds in Northern Ireland. Most of our meetings with children and young people are as a result of requests to meet with me. I monitor carefully the background, location and numbers of children and young people to identify gaps and proactively seek opportunities to address these gaps.

Over the past year, for example, I have been invited to attend multiple schools from across NI, and have met a wide range of groups, from a wide variety of backgrounds.

I am keen to continue to communicate directly with children and young people and would welcome invitations from Committee members to engage with groups that they feel would be beneficial.

The NICCY Youth Panel

Our Youth Panel is made up of 50 children and young people from across Northern Ireland from a variety of different backgrounds, cultures, religions, and none. When recruiting, we advertise widely via various platforms including through social media.

Our Participation Team also sends information to every post-primary school in Northern Ireland through C2K, and to a very wide range of groups working with young people. During our last recruitment, for example, these included uniformed organisations such as the Scouts, the Boys and Girls Brigade, and church youth groups including those associated with the Methodist Church, Presbyterian Church and the Church of Ireland.

When the application deadline has passed, the applications are considered solely on the basis of their demographics, selecting new youth panel members to ensure the panel is as representative of the population of young people in Northern Ireland.

We fill the panel with children and young people from across the Section 75 groups, reflecting diverse geographical areas (rural and urban), religions, genders, ethnicities, those who are care-experienced

¹ Further information is available at: [Culture and Identity: 100 years and beyond - Niccy](#)

² Both reports relating to the UK's withdrawal from the European Union, and the Report on 'It's Our Brexit Too' are available at: [Brexit - Niccy](#)

and are carers. In addition to working with our Youth Panel, NICCY works hard to engage with children and young people through other means to ensure we are reaching a diverse range of stakeholders to inform our work.

This is an ongoing piece of work, and we would encourage the Committee Members, in their engagement with children and young people and youth organisations, in their constituencies, to inform those interested to apply to join - either the panel or the new (online) Youth Engagement Forum that we established in 2023.

In conclusion:

I welcomed engagement with the Committee with regards to the evidence session on the 02 October 2024 in relation to RSE.

As outlined, our position is that scientifically accurate and age-appropriate education for all aspects of life, including relationships, sexuality, pregnancy and reproduction, consent, and boundaries is crucial in preparing children for the world outside of school and equipping them fully with accurate information.

This is especially important in the context of alarming rates of femicide and child sexual exploitation that we are all too aware of.

Should any Member require any further clarification on our position on RSE, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely



Chris Quinn
Commissioner