



**NIACRO Response to the Department of Health Adoption and
Children (Northern Ireland) Bill**

28th April 2017



NIACRO Response to the Department of Health Adoption and Children (Northern Ireland) Bill

1. NIACRO is a voluntary organisation that has been working for almost 50 years to reduce crime and its impact on people and communities. Specifically, its contributions have been to:
 - Support the resettlement of adults leaving prison and those on community supervision
 - Build skills, confidence and employability of people both in prison and in the community
 - Build the resilience of children, young people, families and adults who are displaying behaviour that would put them at risk of engaging with the criminal justice system, supporting positive lifestyle choices
 - Influence service providers in the statutory, voluntary and community sector and building their capacity to provide appropriate support and bespoke training
 - Contribute to public debate and influencing others with regards to criminal justice matters, at the highest level.

At the heart of NIACRO's work is a drive to reduce (re)offending within the understanding that integrated and flexible approaches towards desistance are most effective.

2. Preliminary Comments

2.1. NIACRO welcomes the opportunity to comment on the Adoption and Children (Northern Ireland) Bill, in particular:

- Criminal Record Checks (1.2.30 - 1.2.32)
- Children's Partnership Arrangements (3.1)

3. Criminal Record Checks

3.1. NIACRO believes that young people and adults who have committed offences should not be damaged throughout their lives by a criminal record. This is evidenced in NIACRO's successful [Off The Record](#) campaign in 2015, which called for old and minor convictions received under the age of 18 to be removed from criminal records, as recommended in the Youth Justice Review (2011).

3.2. We believe that people who have offended can make use of their skills, experience and knowledge to make a contribution to wider society. We would ask the Northern Ireland Executive to support the recommendations put forward by the Fresh Start Panel dealing with those issues which relate to issues that stop people from moving forward. In particular recommendation **B2**:



NIACRO Response to the Department of Health Adoption and Children (Northern Ireland) Bill

'The Review Panel's work should continue to consider what steps can be taken to improve access to financial services (including lending and insurance), adoption and travel advice.'

4. Children's Partnership Arrangements

Do you agree that a RCYPSP should be established in statute?

4.1. NIACRO agrees in principle, with placing the CYPSP on a statutory basis, to be known as the Regional Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership (RCYPSP). NIACRO believes that the responsiveness of the current arrangements, although not currently on a statutory basis, provide a strong foundation for co-operation and responsiveness to service delivery challenges for children and families. NIACRO would seek confirmation and clarification on the focus and priorities for the RCYPSP that they would remain similar to those of the CYPSP.

Do you agree with the Department's proposals relating to the structure, membership, chairing arrangements, objectives and functions of the RCYPSP and the duties and powers conferred on it?

4.2. NIACRO agrees in principle, with the Department's proposals relating to the structure, membership, chairing arrangements, objectives and functions of the RCYPSP and the duties and powers conferred on it. We have concerns however, that there are critical elements within the current arrangements which have not been mentioned in this consultation document which include the existing Family Support Hubs which are a critical element of the CYPSP structure. This view was supported in October 2016 by the Health Minister, Michelle O'Neill who made a commitment to prioritise this vital support mechanism for children and families.¹

4.3. NIACRO understands the critical importance of Family Support Hubs particularly in relation to Locality Planning Groups when identifying and evidencing unmet need in particular areas. NIACRO is concerned that the exclusion of Family Support Hubs in this consultation does not take into consideration the importance of the relationship of Family Support Hubs in regard to locality planning and in the subsequent consistent and integrated planning of the Five Outcomes Groups across Northern Ireland.

4.4. We believe that the Outcomes Groups are both flexible and open and we would have concerns that there may be restrictions placed on these Groups in

¹ Northern Ireland Assembly Official Report: Tuesday 25 October 2016
<http://aims.niassembly.gov.uk/officialreport/report.aspx?&eveDate=2016/10/25&docID=277640>



NIACRO Response to the Department of Health Adoption and Children (Northern Ireland) Bill

particular, with their ability to be reactive and respond to emerging themes and issues.

Do you agree that a RCPP should be established, operating under the auspices of the RYPSP?

4.5. NIACRO agrees in principle, that a RCPP should be established, operating under the auspices of the RYPSP

Do you agree with the Department's proposals relating to the structure, membership, chairing arrangements, objectives, and functions of the RCPP and the duties and powers to conferred on it?

4.6. NIACRO agrees in principle, with the Department's proposals relating to the structure, membership, chairing arrangements, objectives, and functions of the RCPP and the duties and powers to conferred on it

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