The Impact of Brexit and the Windsor Framework on the lives of Children and Young People

EA Youth Service

Information and Data Team

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Youth Consultation

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Executive Summary

Brexit is the name given to the United Kingdom's departure from the European Union. On 23 June 2016, the United Kingdom voted to leave the European Union and officially left the 31st January 2020.

The Northern Ireland Protocol set out Northern Ireland's post-Brexit relationship with both the EU and Great Britain. It is part of the EU-UK Withdrawal Agreement, the international treaty agreed between the EU and the UK, which regulates how the UK's exit from the EU should operate.

The Protocol has faced both support and criticism since its implementation. Supporters argue that it preserves the delicate balance of peace in Northern Ireland by avoiding a physical border on the island. However, critics contend that it has created economic and political barriers between Northern Ireland and the rest of the UK, leading to increased tensions and discontent.

In February 2023 after two years of negotiations between the EU and the UK, an agreement was reached to change the way the Northern Ireland Protocol operates. This agreement was called the Windsor Framework.

The withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the European Union has had profound implications for various aspects of society. In Northern Ireland, the complex political landscape has been further complicated by the Windsor Framework, a set of agreements aimed at resolving issues related to Brexit and the Irish border.

The impact of Brexit and the resulting Protocol and Windsor Framework has had and will have on the lives of children and young people has yet to be determined, however some are concerned that it may act as a barrier to them going forward and achieving good health, educational, social and career outcomes.

More than 600,000 people have been born in Northern Ireland since the signing of the Good Friday Agreement. These young people have grown up during a sustained period of peace that has given rise to a new set of priorities.

Brexit has added much controversy and debate to politics in Northern Ireland. There is a view among young people that this decision was made without their voices being listened to and they had no say in the outcomes and its consequences.

This generation of young people have indicated that they want their rights respected, more progressive politics, policies and change, less focus on orange and green and a move away from the politics, divisions and segregation of the past.

Brexit has left many young people in Northern Ireland feeling disillusioned. frustrated and neglected. This can be multi-faceted and include issues around their national identity, their loss of EU benefits, a perceived lack of political voice and consideration for their concerns.

Many young people believe that the Brexit result affect them negatively and impacts on their freedom of movement, education opportunities and career pathways.

Introduction

On the 23 June 2016 the United Kingdon voted to leave the European Union. The referendum resulted in 51.9% of people voting in favour of leaving the EU, beginning the process of the withdrawal from the EU known as "Brexit".[1]

As a result, much controversy and debate has surfaced in the UK and particularly Northern Ireland, with the resulting Protocol and now Windsor Framework agreement coming into effect in Northern Ireland.

Most voters in Northern Ireland voted to remain in the EU, however the overall UK vote was to leave. The UK Government has committed in Article 2(1) of the Protocol to the Withdrawal Agreement, to 'non-diminution' of rights and equality as set out in the Good Friday Agreement (GFA).[2]

The Northern Ireland Protocol of the Brexit withdrawal agreement commits the UK and the EU to maintaining an open border on the island of Ireland, resulting in the de facto Irish sea border between the UK and Ireland. This requires the continued application of the Common Travel Area as well as free trade of goods between Ireland and Northern Ireland.

The Windsor Framework made changes to the Protocol and is a post-Brexit legal agreement between the European Union and the United Kingdom which adjusts the operation of the Northern Ireland Protocol.

The Framework was announced on 27th February 2023 and came into effect on 1st October 2023.[3] The Protocol and Windsor Framework has created new trading border arrangements between Northern Ireland and GB, with the implementation of custom checks at NI ports. Some see this as a barrier to trade and others see it as a constitutional threat to Northern Ireland's place in the union and the UK.[4]

The recent implementation of the Windsor Framework by the EU and the British Government has caused friction and dislike amongst some communities, particularly those from a protestant or unionist background.

Many unionists view the Protocol to as a means to securing a united Ireland and argue that post-Brexit trading arrangements have created barriers between Northern Ireland and the rest of the United Kingdom, due to interference from the European Union.

Initially the issues around Brexit led to raised tensions in certain communities resulting in rioting and violence. This was described as the worst street violence for years after sporadic rioting in several towns and cities and resulted in almost 90 police officers been hurt. Eighteen people were arrested and 15 charged after crowds of predominantly loyalist youths attacked lines of riot police officers and vehicles with bricks, fireworks and petrol bombs.[5]

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[1] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2016_United_Kingdom_European_Union_membership_referendum

[2] https://www.niccy.org/hubs/brexit/

[3] https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-9548/

[4] *McClafferty, Enda (2 October 2023). "Windsor Framework: New NI trade rules 'will work unbelievably well'". BBC News.*

[5] https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-56664378

It has been reported that children as young as 12 were involved in the trouble. It is believed that many young people were coerced into taking part in these riots and violence by loyalist paramilitaries groups who tend to be involved in organised crime as well.

The withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the European Union has had profound implications for various aspects of society. In the case of Northern Ireland, the complex political landscape has been further complicated by the Windsor Framework, a set of agreements aimed at resolving issues related to Brexit and the Irish border.

The civil unrest in Northern Ireland, marked by violence and rioting, has shed light on the fragile peace that has been maintained in the region since the Good Friday Agreement. The unrest, which erupted in response to a combination of factors, including the Northern Ireland Protocol and simmering political tensions, has raised concerns about the impact on young people in the region.

The objective of this research piece is to analyse the impact Brexit and the resulting Protocol and Windsor Framework has had and will have on the lives of children and young people and to determine if this has or will act as a barrier to them going forward and achieving good health, educational, social and career outcomes.

This research aims to analyse the specific consequences of Brexit-related civil unrest on children and young people in Northern Ireland. By examining the context, causes, and implications of the recent events, this study seeks to provide valuable insights into the challenges faced by young people and the potential implications for their well-being, identity and prospects.

A total of 140 young people from a from a range of geographical and educational settings in Northern Ireland engaged with our research through focus group discussions and online surveys. 30 youth workers participated in surveys and discussions. 6 teachers from post-primary schools were also engaged.

Given the sensitive nature of the research topic it was agreed that respondents would remain anonymous. It should be remembered that most of the young people we engaged with had an interest and understanding of politics.

What is Brexit?

Brexit is the name given to the United Kingdom's departure from the European Union. It is a combination of 'Britain' and 'exit'.[6] On 23 June 2016, the United Kingdom voted to leave the European Union, as a result the UK left the European Union at 11:00 pm on 31 January 2020. The UK had been a member state of the EU or its predecessor, the European Communities (EC), since 1 January 1973.[7]

The Northern Ireland Protocol and Windsor Framework

The Northern Ireland Protocol sets out Northern Ireland's post-Brexit relationship with both the EU and Great Britain. It is part of the EU-UK Withdrawal Agreement, the international treaty agreed between the EU and the UK, which regulates how the UK's exit from the EU should operate. The Protocol which came into force in January 2021 is separate to the Trade and Cooperation Agreement (TCA) which is the agreement that governs trade and other cooperation between the UK and the EU.[8]

At the heart of the Windsor Framework is the Northern Ireland Protocol which aims to maintain the free movement of goods and protect the 1998 Good Friday Agreement. Under the Protocol, Northern Ireland remains aligned with some EU regulations, effectively creating a regulatory border in the Irish Sea.

The Protocol has faced both support and criticism since its implementation. Supporters argue that it preserves the delicate balance of peace in Northern Ireland by avoiding a physical border on the island. However, critics contend that it has created economic and political barriers between Northern Ireland and the rest of the UK, leading to increased tensions and discontent.

As a result of disharmony amongst some members of unionist parties in Northern Ireland, that have arisen from certain aspects of the Protocol, particularly on how it would operate and be implemented in Northern Ireland with regards checks and controls it imposes on goods moving between Great Britain and Northern Ireland, a new agreement was agreed to change the workings of the Protocol.

In February 2023 after two years of negotiations between the EU and the UK, an agreement was reached to change the way the Northern Ireland Protocol operates. This agreement was called the Windsor Framework.[9]

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[6] https://www.government.nl/topics/european-union/question-and-answer/what-is-brexit
[7] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brexit
[8] https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-9548/
[9] https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-9548/

Young People's Perspective on Brexit

Young People's Anger at Brexit

At the beginning of this study there was no functioning government in Northern Ireland which may have contributed or influenced the responses from the young people.

Initially, it was apparent that the young people felt strongly against Brexit and the impact it subsequently had and potentially will have on their lives. It should be qualified that most of the young people we engaged with were politically astute and understood Brexit and the Windsor Framework.

Many of the young people believed that Brexit has created fewer opportunities for them and led to increased uncertainty for their futures and has increased political divisions resulting in the uncertain constitutional status of Northern Ireland and the Irish sea border.

One young person noted: *The decisions that were made did not reflect the needs of young people throughout the UK and especially here in Northern Ireland.*

Some of the young people blamed Brexit on the failed institutions at Stormont. They expressed their anger at the lack of government and stability in Northern Ireland. One young person stated: *Brexit is the reason we have no government in Northern Ireland.*

This was supported by another young person who stated: *The political vacuum here has contributed to people's anger, there is a lack of leadership around this issue.*

Other young people suggested that they should have had the chance to vote on the Brexit referendum as it affected their futures.

One young person stated: *I was 16 at the time and feel I was old enough to have an opinion and voice about Brexit, yet not old enough to vote on the issue. I feel like I have been put into a terrible situation by Great Britain.*

Lost Opportunities

There was sense of scepticism from the young people regarding the claims about enhanced economic trade opportunities post-Brexit. Many believed that the damage from Brexit may be irreversible and detrimental to their futures career prospects and opportunities.

One young person noted: *People talk about trade opportunities Northern Ireland has because of Brexit, but we already had those opportunities before Brexit happened.*

Most of the young people supported the view that a lot of EU funding that had been distributed to deprived areas in Northern Ireland had brought about positive long-lasting impactful change in their communities. Many assumed that this funding will not be continued.

One young person expressed the view: *A lot of EU funding went to Northern Ireland. There is fear at the thought of losing that funding when Brexit came about.*

It was discussed by a member of the group that EU funding had contributed to the development and refurbishment of a rail station in their local town and explained how this has brought prosperity and

economic growth to their town. The young person feared that this funding will not be replaced in the future and that Northern Ireland will suffer economically.

Many of the respondents believed that the cost of living and food poverty had increased because of Brexit which exacerbated the rise in inflation and general cost of living. One young person noted: *Brexit has contributed heavily to the cost-of-living crisis and food poverty.*

Another young person noted: *Brexit has caused detachment from the EU and has left a devastating impact on opportunities and the continuous and professional development in Northern Ireland.*

The main concerns expressed by young people over Brexit was the negative impact on their lives of losing the opportunities and rights that they had enjoyed as members of the European Union.

Education and Career Impact

The young people were frustrated at the perceived impact of Brexit on their education and career opportunities, particularly in the context of studying abroad. There was a feeling from the group that Brexit has disrupted their educational plans, caused young people to alter their subject choices, university plans and general career paths.

A teacher noted: *This disruption raises concerns about the unpredictability for young people caused by political decisions.*

The young people were passionate about the educational and career impact that Brexit had and will have on their lives. They discussed how some of them have had to change their study path due to the cutting of EU funding for ERASMUS programmes which had prevented them from studying abroad.

One young person stated: *Brexit has changed my whole education, I was on a pathway to study abroad but when Brexit was voted in, I had to change my subject choices and university plan, course choice, my plan for years all fell through.*

Another young person noted: *There have been fewer opportunities for young people, ERASMUS has been impacted on for students wishing to study abroad, it's really frustrating that programmes have been lost.*

It was apparent throughout the discussions that many young people felt that Brexit has had a negative impact on their lives and future. However, the real question that young people wanted to know was what impact Brexit will have on their futures. One young person asked: *The real question is how Brexit has affected young people and how will it affect our future?*

The ending of the European Social Fund was described as detrimental to the lives and employment opportunities of vulnerable young people. One young person noted: *The ending of ESF funding from Europe has negatively impacted on the lives of people with disabilities and their employment opportunities.*

Young Life and Times research in the year before the Brexit vote revealed that young people wanted to work abroad and viewed learning an additional language as beneficial for their future.[10]

However, in the aftermath of the Brexit, another survey was commissioned which included the views of 1,000 young people to establish how the EU referendum vote has impacted on young people's intention to leave Northern Ireland to work or study outside the UK, and what implications this may have for their ambitions to learn a language.

The key findings showed most 16-year-olds in Northern Ireland opposed Brexit with 72% of the young people if able to vote, would vote in favour of the UK remaining part of the EU. Over two-thirds of the young people felt they would be worse-off outside the EU, with only 14% thinking they would be better off.

Interestingly respondents who identified as British (29%) were much more likely to say they would probably or definitely be better outside the EU.

Those young people who wanted to learn further languages were more likely to have voted to remain in the EU and felt that they will be personally worse-off after the Brexit vote.

Brexit Divisions and National Identity

According to the British Council NI, 72% of 16-year-olds would vote to remain in the EU if the Brexit referendum was held again tomorrow and if hypothetically 16-year-olds were entitled to vote. This was confirmed by young people who believed that they should have had a vote on Brexit as it will affect their lives.

Interestingly those identifying as Catholics and those identifying as Irish were significantly more in favour of remaining in the EU and are also much more likely than Protestants and those identifying as British to think that the EU exit will leave them worse-off. The opinions of those identifying as Northern Irish are much more aligned to those saying they are Irish than those saying they are British.[11]

Brexit it was argued forced some young people to consider how they understand ideas around citizenship and identity. One young person noted: S*ome of us are more inclined to identify as being from the LGBTQ community rather than Irish or British.*

Young people felt a sense of dismay that Northern Ireland left the EU. The idea of being ousted from the EU due to an English majority vote contributed to a feeling of disenfranchisement and a lack of agency in the decision-making process. One young person noted: *As a democrat I accept the result, but I still feel young people should have had a vote.*

During a focus group discussion one of the participants noted: *I feel like Northern Ireland was left out of the conversation, I was annoyed when I see the majority Brexit votes in the different regions of the UK, we didn't want to leave Europe but were dragged out because of the English majority vote.*

[10] https://nireland.britishcouncil.org/programmes/our-work-society/how-open-are-northern-irelands-16-year-olds-world

[11] https://nireland.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/british_council_-_report_2016.pdf

Another young person agreed noting: *I feel like Northern Ireland was basically ignored when it came to Brexit. Rishi Sunak talks big about our trade market opportunities, which England had access to until they decided to leave the EU.*

A few of the young people believed that Brexit is the reason that there was no functioning Government in Northern Ireland due to the political divide in NI parties and that the young people are collateral damage, which affects their lives and futures.

There was a sense of uncertainty and exasperation amongst the young people, with many expressing concerns that Brexit has led to further divide within Northern Ireland.

Some of the young people believe that Northern Ireland has been ignored by the rest of UK when it came to the Brexit vote, with others believing that Brexit has led to increased tensions between communities.

One young person explained: *Brexit has forced some people to become hard unionist or nationalist.*

While another participant stated: *Brexit has divided our country even further.*

The constitutional position of NI was discussed as a negative output from Brexit. Some respondents expressed concerns that Brexit has led to heighten political tensions and has brought the NI constitutional status to the fore.

One young person suggested: *Brexit has brought about the conversation of NI's constitutional place in the UK to the forefront*. *It has made the NI constitutional question be at the forefront whether you agree or not.*

Another young person noted that in some areas Brexit reignited historical divisions, leading to protests, riots, and an increase in sectarian tensions. She noted that local young people, some of whom were ignorant of Brexit, had been encouraged to become involved in violence and civil unrest.

A teacher from a post-primary school in Belfast noted that most of the young people who were involved in rioting and civil unrest had no understanding of what Brexit meant or its potential outworkings. He pointed out: *They were merely pawns being used by sinister gangs. The consequences of this unrest could create division and hate.*

While some young people may have a limited understanding of the complex issues surrounding Brexit, it has been suggested that they were driven by anger, perceived threats to their identity, or frustrations caused by societal and political tensions.

The young people pointed out the social consequences, such as an increase in hate crimes and division, attributing these issues to the political campaigns surrounding Brexit. The lack of leadership and a perceived political vacuum exacerbated the social tensions. One young person stated: *Brexit has encouraged more racism and given racists a platform.*

One young person stated: *There is tension because of Brexit, suddenly there's more flags and graffiti saying, 'no Irish sea border' it makes more interfaces and divisions, this also gives racists a platform, there was more hate crimes and hatred was stoked because of the political campaigns.*

The young people were concerned that Brexit has caused and could further cause a negative impact on relationships between people from different traditional and cultural backgrounds. A young person noted: *The Irish Sea border caused riots in the street and brought a lot of contention.*

Another young person recognised that the anti-social behaviour and civil unrest occurred in deprived communities with pre-existing challenges for young people. She noted that many of those involved would have limited understanding of Brexit and that: *They were causing trouble and damage in their own areas.*

Exposure to civil unrest and violence can have a profound emotional and psychological effect on children and young people. Witnessing or being directly involved can lead to trauma, anxiety, fear, and a sense of insecurity. This can also negatively impact their mental well-being, potentially leading to long-term psychological consequences.

The involvement of children and young people in civil unrest due to Brexit may erode their trust in the police, politicians and the peace process. This loss of confidence can have lasting effects on their perception of the political system and their willingness to engage positively in society.

A teacher noted how his school had brought in the police and local politicians to explain to young people the consequences of their actions and the political implications of Brexit. She noted: *We want our young people to grow up understand others and our institutions and encourage to them to respect the law.*

Another anomaly of Brexit is that people from Northern Ireland can obtain an Irish or British passport. Those holding an Irish passport enjoy more access and rights, however having an address in Northern Ireland precludes them from taking part in educational programmes.

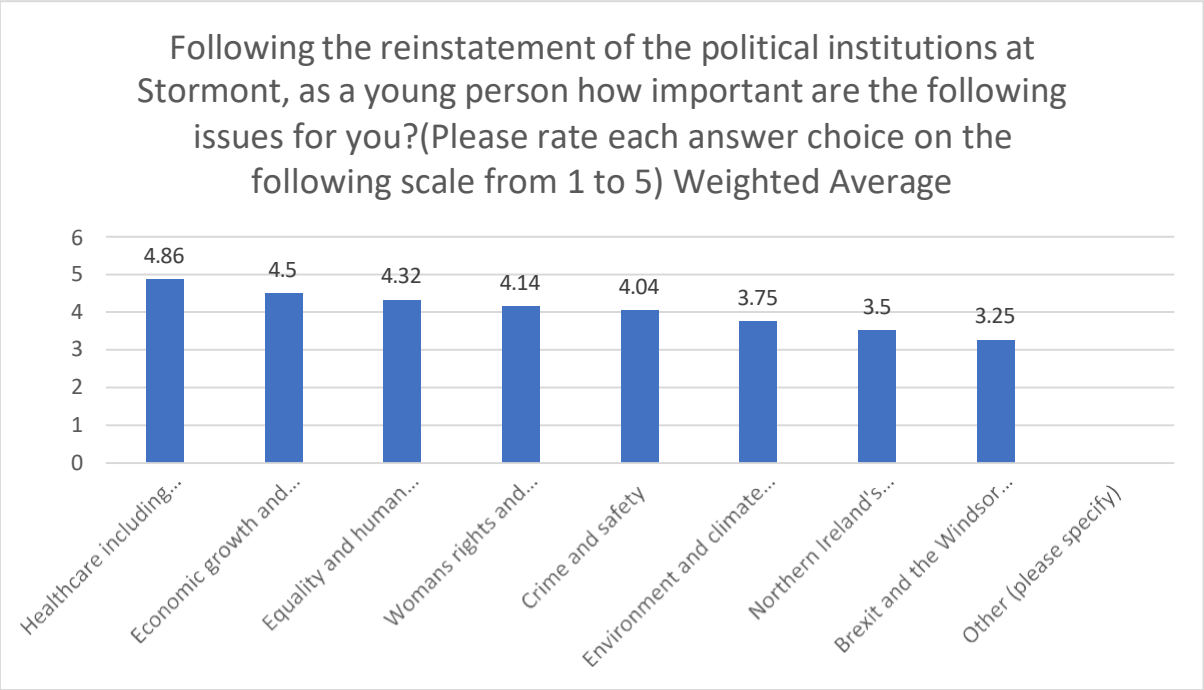
Restored Institutions at Stormont: Brexit Survey Response from Young People

This survey on the impact of Brexit and the Windsor Framework on the lives of young people took place after the institutions at Stormont were back in February 2024. The survey was for young people aged 18-25 years across Northern Ireland and was created by the EA Youth Service Information and Data team to gauge their views and opinions on politics and Brexit.

The young people were asked: *Following the reinstatement of the political institutions at Stormont, as a young person what was the most important issues to you.?*

Interestingly, Brexit and the Windsor Framework was voted the least important issue for young people in a list of nine options available. The most concerning or important issue affecting the young people surveyed was healthcare including mental health, followed by economic growth and equality.

The survey result may suggest that young people do not care about Brexit, though conversations with young people suggest that they are interested in and do care about politics and the political future of Northern Ireland, however many of them have become disillusioned and disengaged with the collapse of the Stormont Assembly on multiple occasions. The survey results reveal that 54% of the young people are interested or very interested in political affairs in NI, with only 7% not at all interested.



Political Stability and Leadership

It is not only the Protestant, Unionist and Loyalist (PUL) community who have concerns over Brexit, the Protocol and the Windsor Framework implementation in Northern Ireland. Research has revealed that many voters in Northern Ireland have concerns across a wide range of related issues which are exacerbated by their lack of trust in those people who are responsible for managing it.

A research poll on Brexit revealed that just 5% of the respondents trust the UK government to handle Northern Ireland's interests regarding the protocol. This is no doubt in direct coloration to the fact that 75% of people questioned do not believe the UK government is responsive to the views of people in Northern Ireland on this subject.[12]

The UK-EU joint committee overseeing the withdrawal agreement was trusted by just one in five NI voters. Also, one in two people did not believe that the EU or the Irish government take views from Northern Ireland on board when it comes to the protocol. While most respondents (65%) agreed that arrangements for Northern Ireland were necessary after Brexit, they were evenly split on whether the protocol is appropriate or good.[13]

A research survey from the NI Young Life and Times 2021 indicated that 65% of young people believe that debates over Brexit have contributed to rioting in Northern Ireland this past 12 months, with 67% of Catholic and 63% of Protestant young people feeling this way. One young person noted: I have no

[12] People across Northern Ireland fear that the protocol will damage political stability | Katy Hayward and David Phinnemore | The Guardian
[13] People across Northern Ireland fear that the protocol will damage political stability | Katy Hayward and David Phinnemore | The Guardian

doubt that riots were caused by Brexit. They were organised by adults though and they got young people to do their dirty work.



Civil unrest resulting from Brexit-related tensions can exacerbate social divisions and deepen existing community rifts. Young people may find themselves caught up in polarised environments, where their social relationships may be strained or influenced by others with negative agendas.

A teacher from an Integrated College stated: *We worked hard at this time teaching the young people about the dangers of getting involved in sectarian clashes and the importance of good relations and staying safe.*

Division can hinder community cohesion, friendship networks and inclusion among children and young people. A youth worker noted: *We struggled to keep young people safe at this time and some of the young people were influenced and coerced by paramilitary groups.*

It was also suggested by a teacher that these events had a direct impact on the lives of children and young people, exposing them to violence, trauma, instability or a criminal record. He stated: *Getting involved not only affects their freedom it will also impact on their education, health and future aspirations.*

The prospect of a re-emerging physical border between GB and NI has sparked fears of division and a potential erosion of the PUL community's sense of belonging. However, a youth worker noted: *The idea that young people understood issues around borders is laughable. This unrest was organised by adults in their own interests.*

The survey also asked the young people what the main reason was for them getting involved in rioting or sectarian trouble. Interestingly the responses showed that, a specific incident or flash point was the primary reason for sectarian trouble with 31% feeling this way, along with young people being provoked (18%) as the main reason for sectarian violence.[14]

[14] https://www.ark.ac.uk/ylt/2020_21/Community_Safety_and_Perceptions_of_Paramilitary_Influence/WHYRIOT.html

A youth worker from the Targeting Paramilitarism Programme stated: *Young people that we currently work with were more likely to become involved as they were already vulnerable and known to some paramilitary groups.*

Several youth workers noted: *At the time it didn't take much to whip up young people. They were being told that their identity was under threat and encouraged to take to the streets.*

During the civil unrest in March and April 2021 in parts of Northern Ireland, it is believed that the unrest and riots were orchestrated by adult paramilitary groups and criminal gangs.

It was reported that before rioting was mentioned on local and national news programmes, messages appeared on social media encouraging young people to take to the streets. One message said protesters needed to *shut down Northern Ireland* and to *stand up and be counted.*[15]

The violence included cars being hijacked and burned on the road and businesses damaged. It is cited that the protocol and policing are the main reasons for this civil unrest, but the main issue runs far deeper than this. A young person noted: *This was a deliberate attempt to cause damage and sectarian tensions.*

Another young person noted that the violence was about a lack of leadership. On a broader scale he noted: *It's about the collective failure of politicians in Northern Ireland to tackle paramilitaries and the conditions that allow them to exist.*



NI Troubles Legacy

Children and young people are too young to remember the Troubles, however the legacy and impact lives on for some. For some this has had an adverse effect and particularly for those who come from certain socio-economic demographic or cultural backgrounds.

The impact of the Troubles can be seen more acutely in areas which are historically segregated, which include interface areas and areas of high deprivation. A youth worker noted: *It is no coincidence*

[15] Northern Ireland needs leadership. Without it, the violence could get worse | Sarah Creighton | The Guardian

trouble flares up in these communities. The young people face so many issues and poverty is everywhere.

With the influence of paramilitaries and organised crime gangs in certain areas, compounded by civil unrest due to increased political instability allegedly resulting from Brexit and the Protocol, some children and young people need protected more than ever from these vulnerabilities.

A youth worker commented: *There is only so much we as youth workers can do to support these young people. We need a whole community approach to tackle these issues.*

Trans-generational trauma, interpersonal violence within families and communities, intimidation from paramilitaries including recruitment and violence, forced exiling, economic marginalisation and social exclusion are all compounding factors for young people living in areas that have been most affected by the NI conflict.[16]

A recent Youth Service focus group revealed that many young people are unclear of the history of the Troubles. It was apparent from the discussions that the young people lacked an awareness or understanding of the Troubles and that they felt embarrassed and concerned about this.

One young person noted: *I was born in 2003 and have never known anything about the Troubles and it is not something we talk about at home.*

Another young person noted: *I would doubt that any of those young people taking part in rioting know what they are rioting for!*

Young people advocated for strategies and support that would provide a standardised, impartial and factual explanation of the Troubles that occurred in Northern Ireland for them to understand better. Some argued that Youth Services were best placed to deliver this.

Research from Queens's University Belfast revealed that children and young people living in deprived interface areas with a history of paramilitary and sectarian trouble are more likely to become involved in paramilitary and sectarian activities than those who do not.

A youth worked confirmed this noting: *Poverty is rife in our community and there are limited opportunities for young people. The prospect of making money illegally is often too easy to refuse.*

The study found that many of the children and young people had experiential knowledge of paramilitaries and their workings from a relatively early age, with an understanding of the roles they play in their communities and the risks for children and young people. This impacted on many of their rights, including their freedom of movement, their right to play and their feelings and rights to safety and security.[17]

Young people believed that Youth Services are best placed to deliver good relations programmes to help tackle division at a local level, ensuring young people are interested and engaged in an informal environment. One young person noted: *Youth workers understand the needs and issues in local communities and can help solve problems young people face.*

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[16] https://www.youth.ie/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Chapter-10B-Working-with-young-people-not-in-educationtraining-or-employment-NEET-Northern-Ireland.pdf

[17] https://cooperationireland.org/projects/communities-in-transition-area-reports/

In 2013 the NI Executive set out a strategy called Together Building United Communities (T:BUC) This strategy committed to improving community relations and building a united and shared society in Northern Ireland.

TBUC programmes which are funded by the Executive and administrated by the EA, offer children and young from across all cross-community areas in NI the chance to take part in new experiences, have fun and build long term relationships.

A youth worker noted: *T:BUC programmes allow us to engage with those from other sides promoting good relations and providing opportunities for young people to get together and learn about opposing traditions.*

The T:BUC strategy seeks to offer a roadmap towards a transformed and more shared society, focusing on equal opportunity, good relations and reconciliation. T:BUC aims to make a real difference to the lives of children and young people from all backgrounds who come together to learn and partake in shared activities.

The Impact of Sectarianism and Paramilitaries

The influence and control of paramilitary groups still exists within Northern Ireland which has had a devastating impact on local communities. These groups continue to actively recruit members, particularly younger males and have a strong connection to organised crime, including drug dealing, prostitution, extortion, and smuggling.

A youth worker with the Targeting Paramilitarism team noted that they exert this influence more at contentious times and this was particularly true in 2021. He said: *Young vulnerable people were targeted which impacted their health and safety.*

It is believed that some paramilitary groups were linked to the rioting and disorder in 2021 because of the loyalist opposition to Irish Sea border arrangements as part of the Northern Ireland Protocol. Reports state that some individual paramilitaries were behind the organisation, supporting and encouragement of young people into violent behaviour.[18]

Interestingly, data from the NI Young Life and Times 2021 survey found that paramilitaries have only a minimal influence over certain neighbourhoods with 58% of young people agreeing with this, 11% disagreeing and 20% neither agreeing nor disagreeing.[19]

A youth worker from an area affected by these incidents disputed this noting: *Paramilitary and gang influence has increased in recent years and Brexit has made it worse. They are exploiting the most vulnerable young people in our community.*

Although with fewer paramilitary related deaths, a marked decrease in the number of shootings, bombing and paramilitary style attacks compared to the previous years, there is a still a real cause for concern with regard the impact and influence these groups are having in local communities.

[18] https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-59552727

[19] https://www.ark.ac.uk/ylt/2020_21/Community_Safety_and_Perceptions_of_Paramilitary_Influence/PMCONT.html

Recent data from the PSNI shows that the number paramilitary style assaults including shootings is at it all time lowest since 1990/91, with a modest decrease each year.[20]

Research from Queens University Belfast looked at the impact paramilitaries have on young people aged 16-25 years living in segregated areas in Northern Ireland. The report suggests the influence and control paramilitaries have on young people from certain communities is growing.

It notes that the identity of paramilitaries is well known to local communities, as they are part of these communities. A youth worker noted: *They use fear and intimidation but also give money to vulnerable young people to keep them on board.*

The idea that paramilitaries are there to protect and serve the local community, with the feeling that these people are to be feared creates a sense of ambivalence amongst young people. Interestingly feedback from the NI Young Life and Times survey 2021 shows that 29% of young people feel that paramilitaries should look out for their own communities with 48% neither agreeing or disagreeing and 23% disagreeing or strongly disagreeing.

This evidence emphasises how the legacy issues from the past have impacted the thoughts and views of young people living in these areas, which can be a barrier in ensuring good education and learning outcomes in formal and informal education.

The research sample conducted by QUB shows that 54% of the young people have had direct experiences of paramilitaries, which includes witnessing or personally experiencing: shootings, fines, exiling, beatings, bans, curfews and intimidation.[21]

Vulnerable children and young people and especially those living in deprived areas are susceptible to paramilitary style control and abuse which infringes on their basic human rights, including their right to movement, the right to play and leisure and their feelings and rights to safety and security. However, some young people see paramilitaries as protectors even though they have experienced first-hand verbal and physical abuse from them.

The legacy of the troubles has caused some communities to become *no-go areas* for policing, which has resulted in local paramilitary groups taking control and seeing themselves as being responsible for community policing.

Before the implementation of the Good Friday Agreement in 1998 and the 25 years since, paramilitaries have seen themselves as protectors of communities which has involved them carrying out perceived informal justice style attacks, which is punishment attacks to police and control their communities. This has included attacks on those involved in anti-social behaviour and drug dealing, with these groups heavily involved in such acts themselves.

Going forward there is a strong need to engage meaningfully with children and young people affected by paramilitary style activities, with a focus on addressing the impact of trauma and the intricacies which sustain violence.

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[20] https://committees.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/109808/html/

[21] https://pureadmin.qub.ac.uk/ws/portalfiles/portal/163931307/Experiencing_Paramilitarism_Understanding_the_Impact_of_Paramilitaries_on_Young_People_in_NI.pdf

More commitment and investment it was suggested is required from statutory bodies for the sustainability of youth and community support services to combat the threat and influence of paramilitary activities on local communities. Young people also wanted more involvement and support from the community and voluntary sector as they were aware of issues locally.

The 2015 Fresh Start Programme is a Stormont Agreement and Implementation Plan which focuses on tackling and addressing paramilitary activity and organised crime in local communities. This programme was produced by the NI Executive in collaboration with the UK and Irish Governments, sets out these proposals under the Programme for Government Framework 2106-2021 and New *Decade New Approach* to address these challenging and intractable issues faced by people living in Northern Ireland.[22]

Hate Crime

The UK's referendum votess to leave the European Union (EU) was followed by an increase in race and religious hate crime of 15-25% in England and Wales.[23] In Northern Ireland, Hate crime and discrimination have been increasing since 2020/21.

The number of reported racially motivated and discriminatory homophobic hate incidents in Northern Ireland has exceeded the number of sectarian incidents since 2016/17. Recent data from the PSNI shows that racist and homophobic incidents (1,764) are 63% more likely than sectarian hate crime (1,082).[24]

Since the UK voted to leave the EU in June 2016 there have been 2,093 recorded racist incidents in Northern Ireland. In the same period there were 1,773 recorded incidents of sectarianism across Northern Ireland.[25]

Hate crime is defined as *any criminal offence which is perceived, by the victim or any other person, to be motivated by hostility or prejudice towards someone based on a personal characteristic.*[26] It is categorised by race or ethnicity, religion or beliefs, sexual orientation, disability and transgender identity. Notably all these strands of hate motivation have increased, except for sectarian hate crime.

The Importance of the Youth Service

Youth Services has been at the forefront of these challenging issues and very responsive to the local rioting that occurred at the interface areas because of the heightened political tensions from the implementation of Brexit and the Protocol.

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[22] https://www.ircommission.org/sites/irc/files/media-files/executive-action-plan-for-tackling-paramilitary%20activity.pdf

[23] https://www.economicsobservatory.com/did-the-vote-for-brexit-lead-to-a-rise-in-hate-crime

[24] https://www.psni.police.uk/about-us/our-publications-and-reports/official-statistics/hate-motivation-statistics

[25] https://thedetail.tv/articles/race-hate-crime

[26] https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/652136/hate-crime-1617-hosb1717.pdf

Throughout this it is evident that Youth Services can proactively support emerging needs at a local level by implementing good practice youth provision to protect and enhance the lives of the children and young people and meeting their needs.

The then education minister Peter Weir, commended the Education Authority's Youth Service and all youth workers for their commitment to helping young people in these demanding situations.

However, it is apparent that Catholic and Protestant young people tend to have different perceptions and ideas on Brexit and the Protocol, with many young people lacking the knowledge and understanding around the fundamental workings and complexities associated with it.

Research from the Young Life and Times survey in 2022 revealed that 78% of young people surveyed did not have enough information on the Protocol to know anything about it, didn't know anything about it and have never heard of the Protocol.

This clearly indicates that a disconnect exists amongst young people and the decision makers, highlighting the need for them to be educated and informed on such decisions that impact the future lives.[27] This is especially true in terms of Brexit and constitutional issues.

Youth work offers children and young people safe spaces to explore their identity, experience decision-making, increase their confidence, develop inter-personal skills, and think through the consequences of their actions. This leads to better informed choices, changes in activity and improved outcomes for children and young people.

Youth work provides safe environments and positive support through practical and social non-formal education. It removes barriers, giving socially excluded children and young people a safe place to go, someone to talk to who can quietly understand and assess their needs and help them to become active and positive participants in their society for both their own gain and public benefit.

Children and young people who have encountered adverse childhood experiences are more likely to develop chronic health conditions and engage in risk-taking behaviours such as anti-social behaviour and drugs and alcohol misuse. This can often lead to negative outcomes later in life, such as reduced educational attainment, limited career opportunities, and poor physical and mental health.

Many young people still experience sectarianism, division and feeling unsafe in certain areas. The Troubles remains a contentious issue and continues to impact on health and wellbeing, family life, education and opportunities in life. It is important that young people understand how and why the Troubles can impact them and their communities.

The influence and control of paramilitary groups still exists in Northern Ireland and has a devastating impact on young people and local communities. These groups continue to recruit members, particularly younger males and have a strong connection to organised crime, including drug dealing, prostitution, extortion and smuggling.

The explosion of social unrest and interface violence that occurred in April 2021 demonstrated that young people remain extremely vulnerable to the influence of paramilitary groups.

[27] https://www.ark.ac.uk/ylt/2022/Politics/PROTOCVW.html

Youth Work Responses

Tackling Paramilitary Programmes

The cross-Executive Tackling Paramilitarism, Criminality and Organised Crime programme is active across Northern Ireland to support people and communities who are vulnerable to paramilitary influence and harm, with commitments being delivered collaboratively by government departments, statutory agencies and partners in the voluntary and community sector.

One of the main strategic goals for the Programme is to try to break the cycle of paramilitary activity and organised crime, and to stop another generation getting drawn into this spiral. Through a range of projects and interventions, the Programme is working towards ending recruitment and turning off the tap for these criminal gangs.

The Education Authority Targeting Paramilitary Programme supports vulnerable children and young people though a range of initiatives. The Ongoing delivery of TPP programme includes; the Delivery of Outreach and Detached programmes through ENGAGE, Support in Hospital Emergency Departments through CONNECT, and Lawfulness Education through STYE Schools based programmes and YVA community-based programmes.

This is a partnership approach that includes the Youth Justice Agency, the Department for Justice, the Department of Education and Education, the Police Service Northern Ireland, the Education Authority and representatives from the community and voluntary sector.

These programmes aim to engage young people who are vulnerable or at risk of involvement with paramilitary groups and deliver programmes that develop young people's resilience and awareness of risk factors.

Some of the objectives of TPP include:

- Reduction in anti-social behaviour.
- Increased awareness of Policing and the role it plays in communities.
- Increased confidence about their place in local community/society.
- Improved relationships with others, including those from different backgrounds.
- Increased resilience and independence.
- Positive changes in attitudes and behaviours towards others.
- Improved physical and emotional wellbeing.
- Improved skills, knowledge, networks to identify and work towards future aspirations and goals.
- Inspired to make a positive contribution to their local community/society.
- Better understanding of their communities and challenges facing their communities.
- Improved access to opportunities.
- Increased competencies and skills.

Planned Intervention

A key youth work response to antisocial behaviour in interface areas and areas with political heightened tension is the Planned Intervention Programme. These programmes are used as a diversionary measure to deter young people from anti-social behaviour and to deal with heightened tension around interfaces.

The programme engages with the *most at risk* young people between the ages of 10 to 25 years in positive experiences and opportunities, as a diversion from involvement in sectarian activities, civil disorder or criminal behaviour.

Planned Intervention is run on a cross community basis and include young people from both Catholic and Protestant communities, as well as young people from other communities including ethnic minority communities and those of different racial backgrounds are also encouraged and welcomed to take part.

They are funded by The Executive Office and administered by the Education Authority to deliver community activities to provide positive alternatives for young people at risk of becoming involved in anti-social behaviour, sectarianism and recruitment from paramilitary gangs and to address heightened inter and intra-community tension around interfaces, including not only physical peace walls, but anywhere there is a potential for community tensions to arise.[28]

Interface areas often have elevated levels of deprivation and poverty and those growing up in these areas are more likely to have lower educational attainment, poor career opportunities and engage in anti-social behaviour. Many rural areas also demonstrate separate living patterns, although these are not formally recognised as interface areas.[29]

The Programmes seek to develop the capacity of individuals and groups of children and young people to meaningfully take part in structured cross community engagement and relationship building programmes, such as T:BUC Camps.

In 2022/23, 77 Planned Intervention projects were completed benefiting 1,459 young people. Data reveals that 97% of young people completed the project, with 83% of participants completing the exit survey. Significantly 95% of participants felt that they were less likely to engage in negative behaviour and 84% of participants feeling more favourably towards people from a different religious or community background.[30]

The TBUC Planned Intervention Programme Outcomes are based on the following objectives:

- Reduction in number of crime and antisocial behaviour incidents in the areas where the young people live.
- Reduction in the number of young people engaging in risk taking behaviours.
- Increase in the % of young people who think favourably about young people in the other community, demonstrated by their ability to talk openly with others about their sense of identity, culture and traditions.

[28] https://www.executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk/articles/planned-interventions-programme

[29] https://eanifunding.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/Planned-Interventions-Guidance-23-24.pdf

[30] https://www.executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk/articles/planned-interventions-programme#:~:text=The%20main%20outcomes%20of%20the,engaging%20in%20risk%20taking%20behaviours

Recommendations

Reform of Institutions

- Reform of the Political Institutions in Northern Ireland so that the Government cannot be collapsed by any one party.

Education and Learning:

- The implementation of a strategy that provides an impartial factual explanation of Brexit and its workings, for all children and young people to understand in a youth friendly way, which should be designed and delivered by the Youth Service. This will help them make informed decisions which will improve and impact their lives and the lives of others.

Opportunities:

- Statutory commitment to continue to support cooperation between youth services and schools in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland.
- Erasmus programmes and funding - young people in Northern Ireland should continue to be able to avail of the opportunities provided by the Erasmus programmes post-Brexit or if not a similar replacement programme with the same outcomes is required. Raise awareness about the potential loss of opportunities and its impact on international education experiences, rallying support for continued access to such programmes.
- Recognition must be given to the circumstances of people on the island of Ireland to take up opportunities for placements and work either side of the border.

Child Protection:

- Maintaining cross border and EU cooperation in relation to child protection is not overlooked in favour of more prominent issues such as trade, agriculture or the economy.

Equality:

- The Good Friday Agreement guarantees equivalence of rights North and South of the border. Governments must ensure that this principle is protected during and after Brexit.

Support Systems for Affected Youth:

- Establish comprehensive support systems for young people impacted by Brexit-related changes in education and opportunities.
- Provide resources and guidance for adapting to altered study paths and career plans, addressing the uncertainties caused by Brexit.

Addressing Tensions and Divisions:

- Engage in community dialogue to address tensions arising from Brexit, such as increased anti-social behaviour, flags and graffiti.
- Work towards fostering understanding and unity to counteract potential division and racism, ensuring a supportive environment for all youth.

Leadership and Representation:

- Advocate for effective leadership and representation in addressing the challenges posed by Brexit.
- Encourage youth participation in discussions around the political vacuum, providing a platform for young voices to contribute to the resolution of related issues.

These recommendations provide a holistic framework for youth workers. By addressing the challenges posed by events like Brexit, youth workers play a vital role in nurturing informed, engaged, politically aware and resilient individuals.

Conclusion

More than 600,000 people have been born in Northern Ireland since the signing of the Good Friday Agreement. These young people have grown up during a sustained period of peace that has given rise to a new set of priorities.

Brexit has added much controversy and debate to politics in Northern Ireland. There is a view among young people that this decision was made without their voices being listened to and they had no say in the outcome and its consequences.

Our study and other research have highlighted that this generation of young people want their rights respected, more progressive policies and change, less focus on orange and green and a move away from the politics, divisions and segregation of the past.

Brexit has left many young people in Northern Ireland feeling disillusioned. frustrated and neglected. This can be multi-faceted and include issues around their national identity, their loss of EU benefits, a perceived lack of political voice and consideration for their concerns.

Many young people believe that the Brexit result affect them negatively and impacts on their freedom of movement, education opportunities and career pathways.

Whilst most young people accept the decision there are other young people who have engaged in anti-social behaviour and civil unrest to voice their concerns about the agreement. Although many of these young people had limited knowledge or understanding of Brexit and have been influenced by paramilitary gangs.

This civil unrest has involved young people, who, despite being born after the Good Friday Agreement, are being held hostage by the identity and culture politics that defined previous times. There is a fear that these views will continue to frame the future.

Understanding the implications of civil unrest is crucial for policymakers, educators and youth workers to develop inclusive and targeted support that address the needs of all young people in Northern Ireland to foster a more inclusive, equal and peaceful society.

Appendix 1

Case Study 1 - Planned Intervention Programme

In Northern Ireland many communities see an increase in crime and anti-social behaviour around the summer months and in particular sectarian flashpoint and interface areas contributing to increased levels of crime and anti-social behaviour.

However, many young people from these areas people benefit from the Executive Office's Planned Intervention projects which aims to improve attitudes between young people who come from different community backgrounds and reduce incidents of anti-social and risk-taking behaviour.

Ten young males from the New Lodge area have taken part in The Executive Office's Youth Engagement Programme. The New Lodge is an area in North Belfast which borders a number of interfaces. For a number of years there have been difficulties with anti-social behaviour including stone throwing and arranged fights which has increased during the summer months. The participants recruited to the diversion programme had been identified as being involved in the vandalism and anti-social behaviour that had been occurring in the area.

These young people had built up a negative reputation and perception within the local community and were not involved in youth services, were barred from other youth centres, and had been regularly involved in risk taking behaviours for some time. The young people were recruited through an outreach process that involved workers from the local Artillery Youth Centre meeting with their parents.

The youth workers knew many of the participants' families and had worked with their older siblings over the years and felt this would be beneficial in assisting them to engage with this hard-to-reach group. The Youth Engagement Programme engaged with the group in a participative manner that allowed them to have a say in the work they would be involved in.

The group members took part in activities including:

- Outdoor team building exercises in the Mourne Mountains and North Coast.
- Outdoor education.
- A session on the impact of anti-social behaviour.
- A community relations session.
- A community clean-up of the area around what is locally known as the 'Seven Hills', an area that has been affected by anti-social gatherings.

The main part of the programme involved a major community clean-up of railings and walls that had been covered in graffiti and vandalised over a sustained period of time. The two youth workers planned and delivered a programme that had a major impact on the local area and also changed the perception of the young people.

They learned the value of becoming positive members of the local community and the importance of improving the environment for all residents. The group of young people also got to see first-hand the positive impact they had made in their community and clearly enjoyed the praise from local residents. At one point an older resident brought the group some food to thank them for the work that they had done for the community[31].

[31] https://www.executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk/planned-interventions-news-stories

One of the Staff members managing the project commented: *The Planned Intervention funding enabled us to plan and develop a piece of community relations work that had a massive impact on the New Lodge community and it let residents see the young people as part of a solution, not the problem."*

Charlene Sharkey, from TEO's T:BUC Camps and FICT Branch said:

It is great to see a project like this, funded by the T:BUC Strategy, really making a difference to young people, and the community they live in. It shows how successful Planned Interventions can bring people of all ages together and provides learning and good practice for our projects to consider when delivering similar programmes.[32]

[32] https://www.executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk/planned-interventions-news-stories

Case Study 2 – TBUC (INSPIRING YOUTH)

The young person was a 15-year-old boy that was recruited through Benbradagh Community Support (BCS), as he was finding it difficult to mix with others his age. He didn't lack the confidence to make friends and interact but just the skills, and this was largely down to his diagnosis of Autism.

The young person really enjoyed previous youth provisions, and BCS thought T:BUC would be perfect for him as he had also formed some strong views from his peers because he can be easily lead. The young person also lives in quite a rural area and outside of school and Gaelic training he would have little time to socialise with others his age, which wasn't helping him develop these skills.

Upon his introduction to the TBUC group, staff soon learnt about his views and he felt confident in sharing them with the group. Staff knew that this was a young person that was in need of TBUC and one they could make a real difference with. ROK was given a lot of one-to-one support within the group and throughout the weeks staff could see a real difference in him. A friendship began to build between him and a few others in the group.

Despite all these young people being from Dungiven, it took T:BUC to bring them together and provide the space for a friendship to build. This was one of the real benefits of T:BUC for this young person and his parents, who before T:BUC would've had concerns about their child's social life. So much so that his mother forwarded this message to RVRA: *Thank you so much for everything. You've no idea how much he gets from TBUC and the difference it makes to him.*

Once the good relations aspect of T:BUC really kicked in staff were provided the opportunity to challenge the beliefs this young person had and discover how these opinions had formed. Through challenging these beliefs and introducing other information, the young person was given the chance to learn and experience the beliefs and sporting traditions of many cultures in Northern Ireland.

With the young person being an avid Gaelic player and supporter, he was also able to aid the staff in educating his peers around the topic, and also demonstrate the feeling of passion and community spirit any sport can provide for a young person. The young person now has a far greater knowledge of the traditions of both religions in Northern Ireland and is much better equipped to challenge beliefs himself in the future.

The young person really has been one of the success stories of T:BUC 2 Inspiring Youth, now looks forward to attending youth provisions in the future with his newly formed friend group. He also, on numerous occasions, expressed his gratitude to staff for what T:BUC had given.

The young person is now 16 and feels he would like to move into some sort of peer leader programme and this evidence confirms to us the need for this type of service for young people, and RVRA has shared his feelings with BCS which is something they could be introducing in the future also. To conclude, staff have seen real attitudinal change in the young person and knows he can move on with a greater knowledge and awareness of Good Relations in Northern Ireland.

Appendix 3

UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)

Rights infringed on children and young people by Brexit:

Article 2 1. *States Parties shall respect and ensure the rights set forth in the present Convention to each child within their jurisdiction without discrimination of any kind, irrespective of the child's or his or her parent's or legal guardian's race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, property, disability, birth or other status.*

- *2.2 States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to ensure that the child is protected against all forms of discrimination or punishment on the basis of the status, activities, expressed opinions, or beliefs of the child's parents, legal guardians, or family members.*

Article 3 1. *In all actions concerning children, whether undertaken by public or private social welfare institutions, courts of law, administrative authorities or legislative bodies, the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration*

Article 8 1*. States Parties undertake to respect the right of the child to preserve his or her identity, including nationality, name and family relations as recognised by law without unlawful interference.*

Article 10 1. *In accordance with the obligation of States Parties under Article 9, paragraph 1, applications by a child or his or her parents to enter or leave a State Party for the purpose of family reunification shall be dealt with by States Parties in a positive, humane and expeditious manner. States Parties shall further ensure that the submission of such a request shall entail no adverse consequences for the applicants and for the members of their family.*

Article 22 1. *States Parties shall take appropriate measures to ensure that a child who is seeking refugee status or who is considered a refugee in accordance with applicable international or domestic law and procedures shall, whether unaccompanied or accompanied by his or her parents or by any other person, receive appropriate protection and humanitarian assistance in the enjoyment of applicable rights set forth in the present Convention and in other international human rights or humanitarian instruments to which the said States are Parties.*

Article 27 1*. States Parties recognize the right of every child to a standard of living adequate for the child's physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development.*

Article 35 *States Parties shall take all appropriate national, bilateral and multilateral measures to prevent the abduction of the sale of or traffic in children for any purpose or in any form.*

Article 36 *States Parties shall protect the child against all other forms of exploitation prejudicial to any aspects of the child's welfare.*[33]

[33] https://www.niccy.org/hubs/brexit/

Recommendations Action Plan

Recommendation	Action Required
The Youth Service will develop and deliver an unbiased and factual explanation of Brexit in a format accessible young people. This initiative will equip them with the necessary understanding to make informed decisions and improve their lives and those of others.	• To provide impartial and factual explanations of Brexit to young people. • The Youth Service will develop tailored educational programmes, create engaging resources and organise workshops.
Person/ Team Responsible Information and Data team. Curriculum Team. Stakeholder Engagement Officer.	Progress Indicators Resource produced and disseminated. Young people have greater awareness and understanding of Brexit and its long-term implications. Increased political awareness and understanding.

Recommendation	Action Required
Raise awareness about the potential loss of educational opportunities and advocate for continued access to international experiences. Recognition will be given to the unique circumstances faced by young people in Northern Ireland, ensuring equitable access to opportunities regardless of geographical boundaries.	• The Youth Service will advocate for continued co-operation between Youth Services and schools, engaging in policy discussions and local advocacy efforts. • The Youth Service will inform young people about international education opportunities. • The Youth Service will collaborate with key organisations and stakeholders and campaign for alternative exchange opportunities.
Person/ Team Responsible Information and Data Team Training Team. Curriculum Team. International Team	Progress Indicators Greater awareness of international learning opportunities. Increased political awareness and understanding. Improved relationships with others Positive changes in attitudes and behaviours towards others.

Recommendation	Action Required
Address tensions and divisions stemming from Brexit and the Windsor Framework.	• Youth Service will organise community dialogues, providing platforms for young people to openly discuss differing concerns and perspectives. • Youth Service will promote empathy and multiculturalism, fostering unity and countering divisions. • Youth Service will work in partnership with local authorities and community leaders to address specific issues like anti-social behaviour and flag disputes.
Person/ Team Responsible Senior Youth Workers. Tackling Paramilitarism Team. Intenational Team. Curriculum Team.	Progress Indicators Improved relationships with others from diverse backgrounds. Decrease in anti-social behaviour. Increased confidence about their place and voice in society,

	Better understanding of their communities and society.