



working to reduce crime and its impact on people and communities

NIACRO Policy Briefings: The Age of Criminal Responsibility

NIACRO believes...

Children and young people can be diverted from the criminal justice system through support which meets their needs and the needs of their families.

NIACRO services:

- Provide supportive early stage interventions to help children and families;
- Represent and give a voice to the views and concerns of children and young people in vulnerable situations; and
- Support children and young people to develop their personal, social, educational and employability skills.

Contact:

Julia Kenny

julia@niacro.co.uk

028 9032 0157

@niacro_

Key messages

1. The age of criminal responsibility in Northern Ireland is currently 10 years old. We believe it should be raised to 12, with a view to considering raising it to 14 at a later stage, as recommended in the Youth Justice Review (2011).
2. The Youth Justice Review found that the age of criminal responsibility was not internationally acceptable. By criminalising children at the age of 10, young people may develop a “criminal identity”. Trapping young people in the criminal justice system is not a deterrent and can actually increase crime.
3. Most children who offend do so for minor offences and rarely pose a risk of harm to others.
4. The impact of gaining a criminal record from the age of 10 creates barriers to a stable lifestyle and can mean that a young person’s chances of accessing education and training, or travel, opportunities are compromised and may in fact lead to re-offending, as our **Off The Record** campaign highlighted.
5. It is much more cost effective to prevent children from offending or reoffending than to punish them with a criminal record for the rest of their lives. An evaluation of our early intervention service for children in 2010 found care or custody interventions for children who offend cost at least 30 times more than early interventions for children showing early signs of offending behaviour.