

## Response ID ANON-UJPB-KP9T-S

Submitted to **Programme for Government Framework Consultation**

Submitted on **2021-03-19 10:57:32**

### About you

**Are you responding as an individual or on behalf of an organisation?**

On behalf of an organisation

**If responding on behalf of an organisation, please tell us your organisation's name::**

NIACRO

**Please provide your contact details below:**

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**Which of the following best describes the sector you work in?**

Charity / Community / Voluntary

**Other (please specify):**

**May we contact you to discuss your response to this consultation?**

Yes

**May we contact you in future about the Programme for Government?**

Yes

**To support transparency in our decision making process, all responses to this consultation will be made public (subject to our Moderation Policy). This will include the name of the responding organisation (if applicable). However, names of individuals will only be published if you give consent below. Please note we will not publish your contact details.**

Yes, I consent to my name being published with my response

### Our children and young people have the best start in life

**Do you feel this Outcome is worth including in the Programme for Government framework?**

Yes

**Please provide any further comments you may have in relation to your response:**

**Do you agree with the Key Priority Areas (listed in the drop down menu below) that have been included under this Outcome?**

Yes

**If yes, please give further details below:**

**Do you feel there are Key Priority Areas missing under this Outcome?**

Yes

**If yes, please give further details below::**

An additional key priority area should be that of mental health, especially in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. Wellbeing and life skills such as mindfulness should be embedded from an early age, especially in schools and in teacher training which should prioritise mental health to identify needs at an

earlier stage and signpost to appropriate statutory agencies including Family Support Hubs and CAMHS.

Within the other key priorities, we have the following notes:

#### Access to Education

To ensure "all have access", it needs to be noted that for families with children with SEN, the waiting list is very long and the support for those on the waiting list, awaiting assessment and diagnosis, is very limited. Perhaps the DoH will need to be involved for this reason.

#### Capability and Resilience

In a world where more and more people are socialising online around the clock (especially due to COVID-19 restrictions), the impact of social media and gaming addiction needs addressing, with education for young people about healthy social media usage and screen time from a young age and media campaigns to highlight the issue for parents including the positive and negative impacts (often excessive) on children and young people. In NIACRO's projects, we are seeing increasingly higher percentage of referrals having elements of gaming or internet safety, gaming addiction, social media addictions – related to technology and parent/child education around it (or lack thereof).

#### Care

It is important that youth justice is mentioned within this key priority. We firmly support these children being seen as children first, with their offence second. Additionally, care experienced children are disproportionately represented in the criminal justice system. For this reason, perhaps the DoJ needs to be involved.

#### Skills and Attainment

The impact of COVID-19 on children and young people needs to be addressed; many are struggling, due to mental health issues, social impact, school refusers, and parents who struggle to home school effectively. We are aware of information being gathered on this front, but would love to see projects being developed to address the inequality that COVID-19 restrictions have brought upon the development of children and young people's skills and attainment, achievements and curriculums. Such inequalities relate to home situations, school approaches (some putting additional support in place such as summer schools or additional classes), areas in which they live (including disadvantaged areas) and more.

**Do you feel there are Key Priority Areas included under this Outcome that are not relevant?**

No

**If yes, please provide more detail below:**

**We have an equal and inclusive society where everyone is valued and treated with respect**

**Do you feel this Outcome is worth including in the Programme for Government framework?**

Yes

**Please provide any further comments you may have in relation to your response:**

**Do you agree with the Key Priority Areas (listed in the drop down menu below) that have been included under this Outcome?**

No

**If yes, please give further details below:**

We would draw attention, under Inclusion and Tackling Disadvantage to the following:

With over 30,000 people ending up in the justice system each year, we call upon the Executive to recognise, under 'Inclusion & Tackling to Disadvantage', that having a conviction leads to (potentially) life-long inequality and disadvantage, in securing work or further education, accessing services such as insurance and, more generally, in having the confidence to take an active role in society. We call upon the Executive to prioritise necessary amendments to Rehabilitation of Offenders legislation to create a tool that is fit for its intended purpose; namely facilitating the rehabilitation of people who have offended, rather than ongoing punitive measures which only further disadvantage and alienation. This has the potential to make society less safe rather than more, as people feel unsupported and unmotivated to desist from crime. It will also go a long way to helping to ensure someone's background is not a barrier to their participation on society.

Legislative changes should allow for a fairer disclosure system in which people know in advance what will be disclosed. Northern Ireland lags far behind the rest of the UK in terms of rehabilitation timeframes and England and Wales are currently considering further adaptations.

NIACRO, and other community and voluntary organisation working in criminal justice, are well placed to deliver programmes complementing and supplementing statutory interventions within criminal justice; to 'walk with' people who need support in many aspects of life to re-build a purposeful life free from crime. Furthermore, we are also well placed to deliver early interventions (see children & young people get the best start in life).

**Do you feel there are Key Priority Areas missing under this Outcome?**

No

**If yes, please give further details below:**

**Do you feel there are Key Priority Areas included under this Outcome that are not relevant?**

No

If yes, please give further details below:

### **Everyone can reach their potential**

**Do you feel this Outcome is worth including in the Programme for Government framework?**

Yes

Please provide any further comments you may have in relation to your response:

**Do you agree with the Key Priority Areas (listed in the drop down menu below) that have been included under this Outcome?**

Yes

If yes, please give further details below:

Relevant across all 4 priority areas, we would draw attention to the following:

With circa 30,000 people a year receiving a conviction, fair access to employment is an issue requiring attention. NIACRO remains committed to educating employers about their responsibilities with respect to employing people with convictions and understanding their rights. It is clear to us, from the training we deliver, that employers need to be educated further on what convictions are and what and mean to include the distinctions between types of convictions. The Ban the Box campaign and NIACRO's Disclosure telephone advice and employer training are critical. Employment is a key part of rehabilitation and can help prevent crime. The Department of Justice should therefore be involved.

NIACRO's ESF-funded employability support programme, Working Well, has supported 1,244 people with convictions into employment and education since 2018. With the ESF programme due to come to an end in 2022, and one year's extension funding available, we join with other ESF providers to call for certainty over the domestic replacement of this vital resource to help ensure those furthest from the labour market secure the support they need, not only to secure employment, but to thrive.

Rehabilitation of people who have offended costs less than incarceration, which costs an average of £37,000 annual for one person. Helping people into education and employment is a major part of rehabilitation and a pathway out of crime, and projects supporting people with convictions will lead to significant savings over time. All departments, including the DoJ, have a role to play in supporting initiatives which help to realise these valuable outcomes.

**Do you feel there are Key Priority Areas missing under this Outcome?**

No

If yes, please give further details below:

**Do you feel there are Key Priority Areas included under this Outcome that are not relevant?**

No

If yes, please give further details below:

### **Everyone feels safe – we all respect the law and each other**

**Do you feel this Outcome is worth including in the Programme for Government framework?**

Yes

Please provide any further comments you may have in relation to your response:

**Do you agree with the Key Priority Areas (listed in the drop down menu below) that have been included under this Outcome?**

Yes

If yes, please give further details below:

22% of NIACRO's Aspire Programme clients (in entry/exit questionnaires) stated that they felt very or fairly unsafe in their area, with 36% stating they felt a sense of intimidation. Restorative Justice has a role to play in relation to this as does policing. However, many of the solutions lie within the outcome We have a Caring Society that Supports People Throughout their Lives; particularly how statutory bodies interact and support each other in the provision of their services. We would point to one excellent example of a collaborative approach to police and health care interventions for mental health distress in Scotland.  
<https://www.gov.scot/binaries/content/documents/govscot/publications/research-and-analysis/2018/08/works-collaborative-police-health-interventions-mental-health-distress>

With respect to Access to Justice: A speedier justice is of potential important and benefit to defendants and victims, mindful of the common cross-over between being a perpetrator and victim. It is of particular importance to avoid those who committed offences as children being prosecuted in adult courts. The impact of turning 18 before court proceedings can be profound given that most adult sentences carry rehabilitation periods double in length to those imposed while under

18. This can have the effect of reducing employment prospects and preventing people moving on with their lives. Being presented with older charges, which defendants assume had been dealt with, can also have a detrimental impact on rehabilitation.

**Do you feel there are Key Priority Areas missing under this Outcome?**

Yes

**If yes, please give further details below:**

We would welcome the following:

- explicit intention to incorporate restorative practices in the delivery of adult justice, hastening and supporting DoJ's Adult Restorative Justice Strategy Consultation outworking
- the introduction of a bail information scheme to help reduce instances of custodial remand
- a more explicit emphasis on support for and initiatives to help decriminalisation of children and young people in care, given the prevalence care experienced people in the justice system
- greater understanding and implementation of what trauma informed practice ought to 'look like' within justice agencies
- a commitment to initiatives which support rehabilitation in the community and in prisons. E.g. to mainstreaming 'pilot' initiatives which have demonstrated effectiveness in reducing reoffending and driving down custodial sentencing (specifically the Enhanced Combination Orders and Problem Solving Courts) and to proportionate spending on rehabilitation activity in custody.
- Active planning that supports continuity of healthcare, education and training in and out of custody which will require greater cross-departmental in the outworking of the justice/health action plan.
- clarification about future resourcing commitments to early intervention services which have demonstrated such promise over the past 10 years

**Do you feel there are Key Priority Areas included under this Outcome that are not relevant?**

Yes

**If yes, please give further details below:**

We feel certain priority areas, particularly Tackling Sectarianism, Building Respect and Identity, with such wide and far-reaching listings, have failed to prioritise may be achievable within the period. What of this is realistic for Government to tackle and how will a commitment to such priorities be manifest? A partner in the delivery of the Aspire programme, delivering under Fresh Start recommendation B12, the short-term (and now year on year) funding commitment has been extremely unsettling to NIACRO and our programme staff, in stark contrast to the long-standing nature of the concern they are seeking to address.

**We have a caring society that supports people throughout their lives**

**Do you feel this Outcome is worth including in the Programme for Government framework?**

Yes

**Please provide any further comments you may have in relation to your response:**

**Do you agree with the Key Priority Areas (listed in the drop down menu below) that have been included under this Outcome?**

Yes

**If yes, please give further details below:**

Key to the idea of a caring society is connectedness. This must also flow through statutory bodies. Many of those NIACRO supports face multiple barriers to inclusion. Many leaving custody have no means of proving identity and yet proof of identity is required for housing, benefits, GP and bank accounts. Photographic identity specifically is challenging and not all forms of photographic ID are accepted and can take up to 6 weeks to acquire. This is crucial for the reduction of harm and vulnerability.

**Do you feel there are Key Priority Areas missing under this Outcome?**

No

**If yes, please give further details below:**

Whilst we do not believe any key priority areas to be missing, we have several observations about several of the themes listed within each, as follows.

**Housing**

The complexities associated with homelessness are not adequately addressed. Links between physical health, mental health, substance misuse, inequality, contact with the criminal justice system (as perpetrators and victims) and homelessness mean this needs to be approached inter-departmentally, not just by DfC and Department of Finance. The summary seems to address homelessness from the social housing stock and landlord perspective, which is needed, but it also needs to understand the routes into and the pathways out of homelessness, to better prioritise preventing homelessness.

**Inclusion and Tackling Disadvantage**

People who live in poverty often also are disadvantaged in health and employment and more at risk contact with the criminal justice system. Inclusion and tackling disadvantage needs to be addressed inter-departmentally to include health, justice and education. 'Levelling up' (Government taskforce) in a Northern Ireland context will also need to address this issue from a post-conflict perspective; disadvantage is multi-generational and historic. Promoting inclusion and tackling

disadvantage will need to involve utilising trauma informed practice across all disciplines and services to ensure equality for all people.

#### Mental Health and Wellbeing

We welcome the inter-departmental approach, yet every policy and practice across these departments should be checked against this priority; screening to ensure that services and benefits are accessible and appropriate to anyone experiencing mental health difficulties. There also needs to be more attention given to dual diagnoses and the resourcing this will require, as well as better transition across all services. This is especially true for people in custody as many services still stop at the prison gate.

**Do you feel there are Key Priority Areas included under this Outcome that are not relevant?**

No

**If yes, please give further details below:**