



10 October 2014

RE: PlayBoard NI Response to the Consultation on Racial Equality Strategy for Northern Ireland 2014 – 2024

PlayBoard is an independent charity and the lead organisation for the development and promotion of children and young people's play in Northern Ireland. Since our establishment in 1985, PlayBoard has been committed to supporting the child's right to play through a combination of: service delivery, service development; campaigning, lobbying; awareness raising and working in partnership with others to put play on the agenda of policy makers and resource providers. The organisation takes great pride in promoting best practice in Play, Playwork and play based School Age Childcare services.

PlayBoard's mission is to drive the play agenda, ensuring that at every level of decision making across society, the child's right to play is not only recognised but is made a reality within the lives of children, young people, families and communities. Children and young people's views, aspirations and perceptions of themselves and the environment in which they live, are at the heart of PlayBoard's work. Our vision is of a society where the right to play is realised.

As an organisation we welcome the publication of and opportunity to contribute to 'A Sense of Belonging: Delivering Social Change through Racial Equality Strategy for Northern Ireland. We believe that play, and [playwork](#) in particular, has a critical role to play in bringing all children regardless of their background together. Through their natural and shared drive to play there is a real opportunity to being about meaningful respect for difference and inclusion of others.

We acknowledge from the outset that PlayBoard's expertise is not in racial or ethnic equality and therefore we are happy to defer to others in their expertise. For example we endorse a number of points referred to by NICEM in their submission including their assertion that:

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Minority ethnic communities, despite making a vital social, economic and cultural contribution to Northern Ireland, are often overlooked in political decision-making, enjoying only the residual rights of the two majority communities on which policy is based.

We also believe that the vision contained within the strategy is weak and would benefit from the rewording suggested by NICEM, which would entail "A society in which ethnic diversity is supported, understood, valued and respected and where we live together as a society free from racism, sectarianism and social exclusion and where human rights and equality are protected for all."

Moreover, our main concern is that the Racial Equality Strategy refers to children and young people within the context of the Delivering Social Change framework and fails to offer targeted initiatives to meet the specific needs of ethnic minorities.

Within the strategy there is no mention of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), which is so fundamental to all children but in particular to those belonging to marginalised groups. The focus of this submission is therefore to highlight the safeguards contained within the UNCRC and specifically Article 31, the child's right to play. Both [UNICEF](#) and [NICCY](#) have developed overviews of the Convention, which at a glance provide insights into the oversights neglected within the Racial Equality Strategy. We also urge cognisance to be given to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Article 31 – the child's right to play

In February 2013, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child released a [general comment on article 31](#). The Committee developed General Comment 17 in response to its concern that State Parties were neglecting their obligations to realize article 31 rights. In addition to the right to play of all children, the general comment makes a number of specific references to the right to play of children regardless of race or ethnicity. The general comment notes:

The Committee is particularly concerned about the difficulties faced by particular categories of children in relation to enjoyment and conditions of equality of the rights defined in article 31, especially girls, poor children, children with disabilities, indigenous children, children belonging to minorities, among others.

The general comment also highlights the interrelated nature of article 31 with other articles of the Convention including its interdependence with for example Articles 2 and 30.

Article 2 (non-discrimination): *The Committee emphasizes that States parties shall take all appropriate measures to ensure that all children have the opportunity to realize their rights under article 31 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. Particular attention should be given to addressing the rights of certain groups of children, including, inter alia, girls, children with disabilities, children living in poor or hazardous environments, children living in poverty, children in penal, health-care or residential institutions, children in situations of conflict or humanitarian disaster, children in rural communities, asylum-seeking and refugee children, children in street situations, nomadic groups, migrant or internally displaced children, children of indigenous origin and from minority groups, working children, children without parents and children subjected to significant pressure for academic attainment.*

Article 30: *Children from ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities should be encouraged to enjoy and participate in their own cultures. States should respect the cultural specificities of children from minority communities as well as children of indigenous origin, and ensure that they are afforded equal rights with children from majority communities to participate in cultural and artistic activities reflecting their own language, religion and culture.*

In addition to connecting article 31 to the other articles, the general comment also contains a specific section dedicated to 'Children requiring particular attention to realize their rights under article 31'. Specific reference is made to children from indigenous and minority communities (see below), alongside mention of the specific needs of girls, children living in poverty, children with disabilities and children living in institutions.

52. Children from indigenous and minority communities: *Ethnic, religious, racial or caste discrimination can serve to exclude children from realizing their rights under article 31. Hostility, assimilation policies, rejection, violence and discrimination may result in barriers to enjoyment by indigenous and minority children of their own cultural practices, rituals and celebrations, as well as to their participation in sports, games, cultural activities, play and recreation alongside other children. States have an obligation to recognize, protect and respect the right of minority groups to*

take part in the cultural and recreational life of the society in which they live, as well as to conserve, promote and develop their own culture. However, children from indigenous communities also have the right to experience and explore cultures beyond the boundaries of their own family traditions. Cultural and artistic programmes must be based on inclusion, participation and non-discrimination.

Also in accordance with Article 12 and as a leading advocate for the voice of the child to be listened to on all matter affecting children and young people and for their views to be given due weight in the decision-making process we are particularly keen to ensure that the voices of children and young people from minority groups are taken into consideration regarding all relevant policy initiatives.

Incorporating Racial Equality within the Children and Young People's Policy Agenda

Currently there are a number of policy developments occurring within the children's sector including the implementation of the NI Executives Play and Leisure Policy and Implementation plan, development of a new Children's Strategy, a Child Poverty Strategy and Bright Start, the first phase of the emerging Childcare Strategy. We believe it is paramount that the specific needs and in particular the play needs of children from ethnic and racial minorities are factored into the policy development process.

We would draw particular attention to the Executives Play and Leisure Statement (2009) and Implementation plan (2011), both of which highlighted the importance of play the lives of children and young people across Northern Ireland and established the need for a cross-government approach to delivering improved play opportunities.

In 2013 Junior Ministers Bell and McCann announced £1.6 million of funding in support of the implementation plan and OFMDFM officials are currently working alongside other government departments, PlayBoard and a number of sectoral colleagues to explore how best to deliver against key actions. Given the need to focus on meeting the play needs of children from minority ethnic backgrounds we would encourage a clear connect between the Racial Equality Strategy and the Play and Leisure Policy.

As noted above racial equality is not PlayBoard's area of expertise but we agree with NICEM's position to support the use of cross-Departmental, thematically-based actions to:

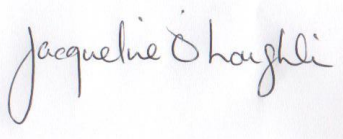
tackle racial inequality, as part of a proposed bipartite action-plan system ... [as] this approach is particularly important for addressing the issues of in-work poverty and child poverty, increasingly suffered by many ethnic minorities.

We also endorse NICEM's call to firstly, strengthen the Ministerial foreword to recognise the positive contribution of ethnic minorities to the local economy and linguistics, religious and cultural diversity in NI; and secondly to move beyond a 'two communities' perspective to ensure that ethnic minorities' needs and multiple identity issues are addressed.

In conclusion, it is our belief that children from ethnic and racial minorities need to be perceived and treated on a par with the 'two communities' of Northern Ireland. More fundamentally their right to play has to be given proper consideration because realisation of their right to play is likely to bring about an increased likelihood of changing social norms, resulting in greater equality and respect within our society.

In closing, for children and young people play is a natural drive and instinct regardless of ethnic, community, social or economic background. Through play children explore their own abilities, develop new skills and establish social connections with other children regardless of their ethnic or community background. It is our hope, that the Racial Equality Strategy will recognise the value of play and playwork to this end and that along with other strategies and initiatives, an appetite can be created to genuinely bring about a more equal and unbiased society for the future generations.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Jacqueline O'Loughlin". The signature is written in dark ink on a light-colored background.

Jacqueline O'Loughlin
Chief Executive Officer