

# Questions: Post- Primary School

## Introduction:

To celebrate Universal Children's Day on 20<sup>th</sup> November, Koulla Yiasouma, the NI Commissioner for Children and Young People (NICCY) and CCEA joined together to host her first ever live chat for primary and post primary teachers and pupils to learn more about the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).

Pupils had the chance to explore and ask questions about issues affecting them and find out more about how their lives are governed and how they can participate to improve the quality of their own lives.

Understanding of children's rights and the UNCRC are key aspects of the LLW (Learning for Life & Work) curriculum and can be further explored with workshops and exercises in the UNCRC Resource Hub.

Engaging with children's rights can help pupils to:

- Respect their own rights and the rights of others;
  - Recognise the interdependence of people, communities and the environment; and
  - Contribute to the welfare of school, the community and the environment.
- KS3 & KS4 pupils can progress through Learning for Life and Work, Local and Global Citizenship strand and especially the themes of Human Rights and Social Responsibility.

During the post -primary school webinar session, the Commissioner for Children and Young People – Koulla Yiasouma– was sent over 40 questions. Koulla had time to answer almost 20 of these during the session. She promised to follow up with answers to all questions, which can be found within this report.

As far as possible, questions have been grouped into common themes to avoid repetition. As appropriate, reference has also been made to the actual recoding of the webinar and to the responses made from the panel to the incoming questions from schools.

Links have been added to provide additional information on the various issues.

If you have any further queries or questions, please contact the Participation Team on 028 90311616 or [participation@niccy.org](mailto:participation@niccy.org).

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## United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC):

See also webinar question and response to **“What is the UNCRC?” @ 4.30 mins into recording.**

- **“What rights do you think are most at risk in the modern day world?”** From Strangford College, Newtownards.

*“All rights are very important but there are two which we must do a lot more work on. Firstly, making sure that all children have their best interests (Article 3) taken into account because it reminds us of the importance of seeing each child as an individual. I also think Article 12 is really important. This is about making sure children have a voice in decisions about their lives because as I always say “the main expert in a child’s life is the child themselves.”*

- **“In your experience, what are the most common ways in which children's rights are violated?”** From Loreto Grammar School, Omagh

**See webinar response @26.40 mins.**

- **“How can awareness of children's rights be raised amongst adults?”** From Loreto Grammar School, Omagh

*“I think adults should know about children’s rights because that will make sure that they know how to protect them including when to ask for help”.*

*“Article 42 of the UNCRC says that the government must make sure that the all the promises made within the Convention should be made known to adults and children alike.*

*“In the meantime, we can all help spread the word about children’s rights by sharing our knowledge about how important they are to our family, friends and community. You can also make sure that people who make decisions on your behalf – local Councillors, MLAs, MPs, teachers and youth workers – are also aware of children’s rights and the UNCRC.”*

- **“How do you think the children's rights curriculum should fit with the teaching goals of schools in NI?”** From St Columb's College, Derry

**See webinar response @ 34.10 mins**

- **“Do you think teaching children their rights is risky, as they may know too much?”** From Year 9 student council, St Columb's College, Derry

**See webinar response @ 5.45mins**

See also webinar question and response to **“Why as students don’t we get a bigger voice in deciding how rights are taught to us?” @ 7.05mins**

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See also webinar question and response to **‘Would it be beneficial to ask pupils for feedback to help improve how we get taught?’ @ 35.25 mins**

See also webinar video question and response to **‘What is the difference between human rights and children’s rights?’ @ 23.07 mins**

## Poverty:

- **Aaron wants to know what could be done for children living in poverty in Northern Ireland?** From Longstone Special School, Belfast

See webinar response @ 21.55 mins.

- **“How many victims of child poverty are there in NI? Are the numbers on the increase?”** From St Columb's College, Derry

*“There are 444,000 children in Northern Ireland 103,400 of these children live in poverty - this figure is likely to rise with the implementation of Universal Credit. The majority (61%) live in households with at least one parent who is working.”*

*“That is almost 1 in every 4 children in Northern Ireland living in a family which struggles to provide for their basic needs, providing a warm, adequate home, nutritious food, appropriate clothing and pay for childcare costs. Children whose parents often have to get into debt to pay to make ends meet and do not have the means to save money for unexpected costs or family outings.”*

*“Children in poverty are twice as likely to leave school without 5 good GCSEs. They are also more likely to suffer poor mental health and have fewer years of good physical health.”*

*“Child poverty is not inevitable. It is important to recognise the success of government policy in reducing pensioner poverty. If Government create and put the right policies in place, child poverty can be eradicated.”*

For further information on **Child Poverty** [click here](#).

## Mental Health:

- **“Do you think issues surrounding Mental Health should be a priority for schools?”** From St Columb's College, Derry
- **“How can we raise more awareness about young people's mental health?”** From St. Catherine's College, Armagh

See response @ 11.35 mins

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- **“How are you dealing with mental health issues for students during stressful exam seasons and what can we do to help it?”** From Strangford College, Newtownards
- **“There's a real problem with depression in Northern Ireland. How can we, as young people, learn to combat this problem? Advice and strategies?”** From Strangford College, Newtownards

*“The UNCRC says that children and young people have the right to the best possible health, including support and services to keep mentally healthy and for special support where the problems are harder to fix. Young people spend lots of their time in school with their teachers and other pupils focusing on ‘academic learning’.”*

*“It is also really important that schools are places that young people spend time learning how to look after their emotional wellbeing. This includes things that young people can do themselves to manage stress and anxiety and to know where they need to go for help if they need it.”*

*“There is a lot of pressure placed on young people with demands from school, friends, home life etc. so it is really important that more is done to reduce stress placed on young people. It is also important that young people are given support to manage their stress and anxiety, encouragement to seek help if they need it and to make sure they know where to get the help.”*

*“I have just published a ‘review of mental health support and services for children and young people’ called ‘**Still Waiting**’. This includes a number of things I think government can do to make things better. I am now working to make sure that the recommendations are implemented and this includes how we take away stressful situations from children’s lives and help them deal with those situations that are stressful.”*

**You can read a young person’s version of the Still Waiting report [here](#).**

**Click [here](#) for advice on dealing with exams stress.**

**Click [here](#) for additional advice and support on dealing with mental health issues.**

## **Integrated / Shared Education / Cross Community Engagement:**

*“I think that children being educated together is very important. Schools working together to make sure that children of different religions get to know each other and work side by side is a great start in moving our education system and society forward. Shared education is the beginning of the process that moves towards all children and young people being educated together, regardless of their religion, race, ability or gender. Which is what children and young people are telling us they want.”*

- **“We are keen to do more cross community work with different schools and for this to be part of our curriculum every year so a we can grow up with the friends we make”** From year 8 at St. Louise's College, Belfast

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See response @ 9.45mins

- **“What do you think of the value of Shared Education in terms of promoting children's rights?”** From Strangford College, Newtownards

See response @ 10.25 mins

See also webinar response to ‘What happens if a student wants to take a subject for GCSE but it is not offered in their school’ @ 39.40 mins

## Technology / Digital:

- **“What do you feel about children and their right to use mobile phones in school?”** From Castle Tower School, Ballymena

*“From the perspective of children’s rights, the best interests of the child should be a primary consideration. This means that your best interests are the most important thing when it comes to any decisions about your life. Rules in school are important to make sure that schools can educate children and teachers can do the best job that they can. “*

*“These rules should be in place to make sure that children’s best interests and their right to an education are being protected. This is maybe why schools don’t want children to use their phones in school, as the focus for schools is to make sure that children get a good education without any distractions caused by phones. So generally, I do not think it is a good idea for children to use their mobile phones in school unless the school, the child and the parents decide it is in their best interests”*

- **“Do you feel that parents checking their children's mobile phone is violating their right to privacy?”** From Strangford College, Newtownards

*“Parents also have to make sure that the decisions that they take have the best interests of their children as the most important consideration. Parents have a duty to protect their children and keep them safe. I think that parents check their children’s phones for this reason but there is a time when parents have to trust their child”*

See webinar response @32.50 mins

- **“What are your views on flash photography in schools?”** From St Columb's College, Derry

*“Schools use imagery and videos for a variety of purposes, including prospectuses, display boards, educational purposes, conferences and the school website. At times, this would mean that flash photography is used.”*

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*“However, around 1 in 100 people has epilepsy and of these people, around 3% have photosensitive epilepsy. This is when seizures are triggered by certain rates of flashing lights or contrasting light and dark patterns. Photosensitive epilepsy is more common in children and young people (up to 5%).”*

*“It is recommended that all parents / guardians be asked to complete a consent form on an annual basis, which will determine whether or not they allow their child to participate in photographs and videos or whether there particular issues to be aware of, such any potential impact of using flash photography.”*

### **Government:**

*“Unfortunately, it is our children who are suffering directly and most profoundly from the failure to form a local Assembly. Children are being unfairly impacted by the political impasse. We need local decision makers advancing legislation on local issues or children are going to continue to suffer and fall further behind the rest of the UK. 2 years is a long time in child’s life, it’s completely unacceptable that children continue to miss out on the services they urgently need to live safe and healthy lives. Action must be taken to ensure progress on implementing our children’s rights through developing legislation, strategies and services.”*

*“In Education, for example, we have been hit by a funding crisis where schools are asking parents to top up their budgets just so they can afford everyday items like stationary. Over the last 8 years, Department of Education funding has dropped 12%, by £233m.”*

*“I also know that children with special educational needs are not being identified early enough and are waiting too long to be assessed. No government means new regulations are being held up.”*

*“We need to give children the best start in life by adopting a Children’s and Young People’s Strategy. This would place obligations on all NI Government Departments and Agencies to co-operate with each other in order to ensure the realisation of 8 well-being outcomes.”*

*“Our children need to be protected online. A draft e-safety strategy requires Executive approval to publish it for consultation. The Action Plan highlights the role and responsibility of companies to their users, empowers parents and carers and supports schools.”*

*“On Welfare Reform, 27% or 118,000 children in Northern Ireland are in poverty and changes to social security are likely to increase this. Local children need local representation to protect their rights.”*

*“We need a Bullying in Schools Act. Given the UN Committee’s call to ‘intensify efforts’ to tackle bullying and violence in schools, this should be commenced and robust monitoring put in place as soon as possible. This would link to an E-safety strategy - a draft strategy has been developed and requires NI Executive approval to publish it for consultation.”*

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*“The above are those I deem most pressing but are by no means all the issues which need to be progressed to ensure further realisation of children’s rights - a task ultimately for the NI Executive and Assembly.”*

- **“Is our lack of a working government having an immediate impact on children's support services?”** From Castle Tower School, Ballymena

See webinar response @ 15.20 mins

- **“Is funding from government risking our schooling and our ability to succeed in exams?”** From Strangford College, Newtownards

See webinar response @ 38.05 mins

## Homelessness:

- **“We are also concerned about the number of homeless people currently in Northern Ireland and want to know what is being done to address this issue.”**  
From St. Louise's College, Belfast

See webinar response @ 19.45 mins

- **“If we are entitled to shelter, can we not care for the homeless and provide animal friendly centres if they have pets? Can the shelters not provide beds and food for the animals?”** From Bangor Academy and Sixth Form College

*“A very good question. I’m not aware of this service here in NI although I’m sure if our homeless support organisations had the resources and facilities they would do so. There is a voluntary organisation based in England called Dogs on the Street (<https://www.dogsonthestreets.org/>) which has a fully equipped mobile veterinary surgery vehicle allowing ease of access to dogs in need, DOTS ensures all the essential items and services are provided for free each and every week.”*

*“Maybe it’s something you could explore further?”*

## Brexit:

*“In late 2017, I, and the Ombudsman for Children (OCO) in Ireland held a conference involving over 100 young people to explore the impact of Brexit on Children’s Rights.”*

*“We worked with a cross border steering group of 22 young people, who developed, and then led the event in Newry in November 2017. Together, these young people explored how Brexit might affect children and young people in Northern Ireland and*

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*the Republic of Ireland, and provided key decision-makers with the opportunity of hearing directly from the young people of their concerns”*

**[Click here for a link to the report and addition information on NICCY’s Brexit work.](#)**

- **“Will Brexit impact children and young people?”** From Lismore Comprehensive, Belfast
- **“Would it be possible to give more consideration to the issue of students from NI who wish to study in the South of Ireland? (There is no collective alternative offered by all universities in the South to leave this option more accessible. Furthermore, will Brexit compound this issue?)”** From St. Catherine's College, Armagh

**See webinar response @ 24.05 mins**

## **Health care:**

- **“If we have the right to the best possible health care available, then why not help my friend more.”** From Bangor Academy and Sixth Form College
- **“I have a friend who has a curable brain tumour that can have surgery but not here only in the USA. If the NHS can’t provide this then why can’t they help towards the costs, which is 115,000.”** From Bangor Academy and Sixth Form College

*“I think I’m aware of this case and I understand money has been raised to cover the costs which in good news. Whilst I cannot comment on specific cases due to confidentiality and without knowledge of all the facts, if a complaint is made to my office, or I feel that a public authority has not provided an adequate service or acted in the best interests of any child or young person, I will challenge and hold them to account to ensure the young person has their right to the best health care possible (Article 24) fulfilled.”*

## **Academic Selection:**

*“I would like to see the education system in Northern Ireland moving away from the use of the transfer test. Children have told me that it puts too much pressure on them and I know that it can result in big differences in how well some children do in education as they get older.”*

*“I am also worried about the fact that you may have to pay to sit the exams and the use of tutors which parents may choose to pay for as this does mean that parents who don’t have the money to pay may be at a big disadvantage.”*

*“I would like to see the education system in Northern Ireland being one where all schools can give all children an excellent quality education. If this were the case, there would be*

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*no need for the transfer test as every school would be able to meet the needs of all children. I am working on this.”*

- **“Is academic selection the way forward?”** From Strangford College, Newtownards

See webinar response @ 37.05mins

## Work Experience:

- **“We wanted to ask do you think there would be an opportunity to introduce work experience opportunities for year 9 pupils into the curriculum?”** From St. Louise's College, Belfast

See webinar response @ 8.45 mins

## Employment:

- **“Max from Longstone is worried about the global economy collapse and that he won't be able to get a job when he leaves school.”** From Longstone Special School, Belfast

*“Hi Max, unfortunately my remit doesn't give me control of the global economy, just NICCY's own budget! But I do share your concern and am worried about the future of the economy in NI and what it means for our young people and families”*

*“The UNCRC cannot guarantee you a job when you leave school but it does put an obligation on the government and your school to provide the services and support to give you the best opportunity in life.”*

*“Article 29 says that the school you go to must give you chances to develop all of your personality, skills and talents, it is not just about exams and tests. Through doing this, it should prepare you for life when you leave school.”*

## Environment:

- **“Joshua is concerned about our oceans being littered with plastic and the effects on his health.”** From Longstone Special School, Belfast
- **“Christopher is worried about the amount of air pollution there is and thinks this is going to be bad for his health.”** From Longstone Special School, Belfast

*“Good questions Joshua and Christopher. All human beings depend on the environment in which they live whether that be plastic in the ocean or pollution in the air we breathe. A safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment is integral to the full enjoyment of a wide range of human rights, including the rights to life, health, food, water and sanitation. At the*

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*same time, protecting human rights helps to protect the environment. When people are able to learn about, and participate in, the decisions that affect them, they can help to ensure that those decisions respect their need for a sustainable environment.”*

*“In recent years, the recognition of the links between human rights and the environment has greatly increased. The number and scope of international and domestic laws, legal decisions, and academic studies on the relationship between human rights and the environment have grown rapidly.”*

*“In fact, Article 29 of the UNCRC says that you and all other children and young people, have the right to an education which develops your personality, respect for others’ rights **and** respect for the environment.”*

## Play and Leisure:

1. **“Samuel says he does not have any parks to walk his dog in near his house.”**  
From Longstone Special School, Belfast

*“Samuel, it’s your local council (Belfast City Council) that has responsibility to provide parks, open spaces and playgrounds along with sports, leisure services and recreational facilities for children and young people (and their pets).”*

*“Article 31 of the UNCRC says that your government should recognise your right ‘to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child’. I try to remind councils and others of the importance of safe, open spaces for children.”*

*“Also in 2016, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child made a recommendation to the UK Government (and its devolved Assemblies) to ‘fully involve children in planning, designing and monitoring the implementation of play policies and activities relevant to play and leisure, at the community, local and national levels.’*

## Homework/School:

- **“What do you feel about a ban on homework to let children enjoy their time at home and have rest and play?”** From Longstone Special School, Belfast

**See webinar response @ 16.50 mins**

- **“Why have homework, when we are in school for so many hours?”** From Lismore Comprehensive, Belfast

*“There are many pros and cons about homework and these have been debated for years and years and years.”*

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*“I think it’s hard to say what is too much as it may depend on many things such as individual abilities and other demand on your time – such as sports, part-time jobs, family responsibilities, etc.”*

*“However, if you feel overburdened by homework or find particular types of homework beneficial to you, the best thing you can do is have a conversation with your teacher. Be open and honest about your feelings regarding homework and work with them to achieve a reasonable balance that helps you achieve your goals.”*

Follow this [link](#) for a few pros and cons about homework.

- **“Aaron would like to see a reduced school week - only in school Monday – Thursday”** From Longstone Special School
- **“Do you think secondary school hours should be changed to reflect the sleeping patterns of teenagers?”** From Bangor Academy and Sixth Form College

*“Thanks Aaron and Bangor Academy. There are many aspects of the education system that I would like to see change. So much so that I have been carrying out a ‘Big Conversation’ with children and young people, parents, teachers and professionals about what the ideal education system should look like.”*

*“I have received lots of great suggestions about changes that people would like to see happening to make the education system in Northern Ireland better and I will be working towards making sure that decision makers in education are made aware of all of these and to bringing about positive change. The right to education, as outlined in the UNCRC, obliges the Government to take into account the child’s special developmental needs and also provide an education that is both child friendly and child centred.”*

*“There is a very strong argument for changes to be made to the education system to take these factors into greater account in providing children with their education. I will take both of these suggestions forward as part of our ‘Big Conversation’ and I encourage you to raise these issues with your school and to make your voices heard – do you have a school council? You have a right to have your views heard and taken into account in all decisions that impact on your lives under Article 12 of the UNCRC.”*

*“I will continue to work with decision makers in education to make sure that the education system in Northern Ireland changes to be the best that it can be and meet the needs of children and young people fully. Thank you for your suggestions.”*

### High Energy Drinks:

- **“What are your thoughts on the sale of high sugar energy drinks to children?”**  
From St Columb's College, Derry

**See webinar response @ 18 mins**

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## Youth Services:

- **“How do you feel about the increase of funding for youth clubs and other youth organisations, as this is an essential part of outside school interaction and skill building for young people?”** From St. Catherine's College, Armagh

See webinar response @ 29.10 mins

## Bullying:

- **“What can teachers and young people to do to stop bullying?”** From Strangford College, Newtownards

*“Bullying is always wrong. Young people should always report bullying and these reports must always be addressed by adults. A child who has bullied another child must always know that what they have done is wrong and given as much support as possible to make sure that they never do it again. Of course, if a child has been bullied they must get all the help they can to recover.”*

*“A new law to better protect children from bullying in schools is going to be introduced which should help schools deal with bullying better. As a result of this new law, there will be new Guidance for all schools about how to record and deal with bullying which should mean that children in all schools across Northern Ireland are better protected from bullying. NICCY was involved in the development of the new law and we hope that it will make an important difference to children’s lives.”*

See also webinar response @ 30.35 mins

## Services:

- **“Ella would like to be able to start to learn how to drive at 16, is this something that may come in in the future?”** Longstone Special School, Belfast

*“I know that learning to drive is important for many people, particularly young people. It can open up to a range of opportunities for educational and social activities. I am also aware however that there is also a great deal of responsibility as, unfortunately, there are many road traffic accidents occurring that involve young people.”*

*“The recent Graduated Driver Licensing (GDL) consultation (2017) has the aim of establishing a revised training and testing regime for car drivers and motorcyclists, and will introduce some post-test restrictions for drivers/riders with the aim of reducing new, mainly young, drivers/riders in fatal and serious road collisions.”*

*“Unfortunately for Ella, this does not include reducing the driving age to 16 and I can’t see this changing anytime in the near future.”*

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- **“Should sixth-form students be issued a student card in order to receive discounts that otherwise wouldn't be provided?”** From St. Catherine's College, Armagh

*“A good question, thank you St. Catherine’s. I understand that there are student discount cards already available for young people. I’ve noted a couple of websites below to guide you on this. But to answer your question, yes I do and I as soon as government comes back I will be asking them to make sure that child public transport fares apply to 18 and do not stop at 16 like they do now”*

## International Student Identity Card Translink’s yLink Card

### School Uniform:

- **“Is stopping non-uniform days not taking away students' right to expression and freedom?”** From Strangford College, Newtownards

*“There are no laws in Northern Ireland which relate to school uniforms. School uniform policy is determined by individual schools. While I understand why school uniforms are necessary, I firmly believe that schools need to take a common sense approach to school uniform policy so that the right of the child to freedom and self-expression are also upheld.”*

*“Again there are pros and cons to uniforms and non-uniform days and the best way I would suggest to deal with this issue may be through your school council and making sure that your views and voices are heard – you have that right under Article 12 of the UNCRC!”*

- **“Should girls be allowed to wear trousers?”** From Strangford College, Newtownards

*“As above, there are no laws in Northern Ireland which relate to school uniforms. There was a case in England in 2000 about this issue that was settled in the favour of the child as the school accepted that it was discrimination not to allow girls to wear trousers. The requirement to wear school uniform is not a breach of the rights of the child, however, the European Court of Human Rights has ruled that the requirement to wear a uniform must not result in discrimination on the grounds of gender, nor should it have a disproportionate effect on any gender.”*

*“So, to answer the questions yes, I believe that there is a very strong argument that girls in school should be allowed to wear trousers. We have had a number of cases around school uniforms and we would be happy to advise you on this issue if you want to contact us directly. Don’t forget to try to address this issue through your school council and make sure that your views and voices are heard (Article 12)”*

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## Special Educational Needs:

- **“Should students with dyslexia not be more accommodated by exam boards and schools with regard to spelling, punctuation and grammar?”** From Strangford College, Newtownards

*“There is an obligation on Government to make sure that the needs of all children and young people are met in education. Students with additional needs, including dyslexia, should have their needs met and should not be at any disadvantage because of their condition.”*

*“There are laws in place which students with dyslexia can rely on to make sure that their needs are accommodated in education. If you have any concerns that your needs are not being accommodated fully in school, please contact NICCY directly for advice.”*