



Northern Ireland
Statistics and Research Agency
Gníomhaireacht Thuaisceart Éireann
um Staitistíci agus Taighde

What Matters Most?

A qualitative analysis

December 2020

NISRA Hub Research

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BACKGROUND

This piece of research forms part of a range of evidence gathered by The Executive Office (TEO) to inform the development of the Programme for Government (PfG).

The Programme for Government is the Executive's highest level strategic document. It determines the direction of travel and provides the basis for the work of every government department. Since 2016, and in line with recommendations of the OECD and consistent with the process and approach outlined by the 'New Decade, New Approach' document, the local administration has been following an "Outcome-based approach" to the PfG which puts a focus on achieving real world impacts in the things that people have told us matter to them.

This research was undertaken by NISRA (The Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency) Hub Research, exploring the most pressing 'big issues' facing our society today.

Discussions were conducted with a range of groups and are representative of the people who participated. Findings from each group were used to create a thematic framework and provides the basis for the findings of this paper.

NISRA would like to thank all those who participated and the organisations who helped facilitate the discussion. A special thanks to:

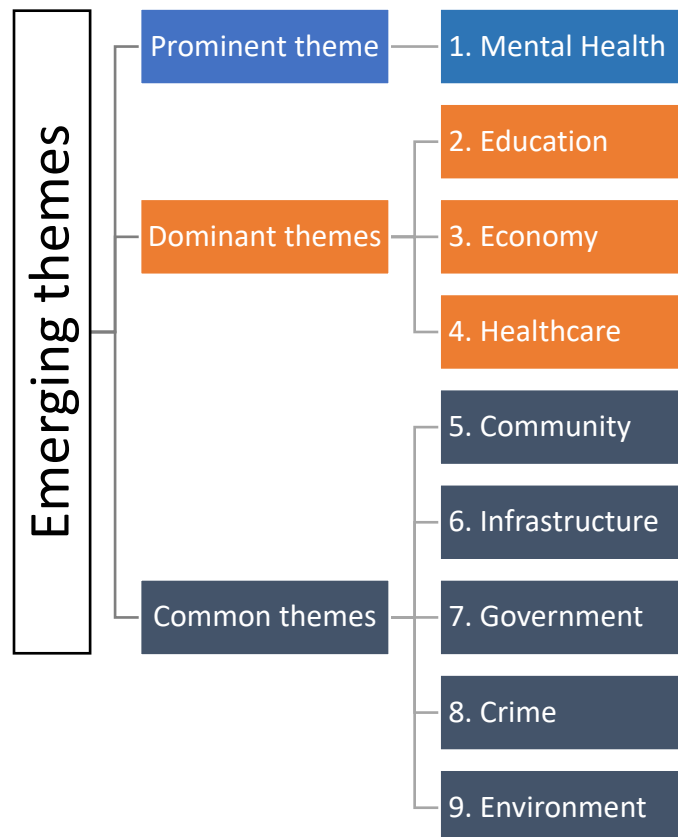
- ❖ Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People (NICCY)
- ❖ The Rainbow Project
- ❖ Northern Ireland Council for Racial Equality (NICRE)
- ❖ Disability Action for Northern Ireland

THEMATIC FRAMEWORK OVERVIEW

Participants across all of the groups were fully engaged in the discussion and we thank each and every-one of them for their valuable contribution.

On completion of fieldwork, we conducted a thematic analysis. Nine themes emerged encompassing issues that participants felt were the most pressing facing our society today.

Figure 1: Emerging themes from the Thematic Framework

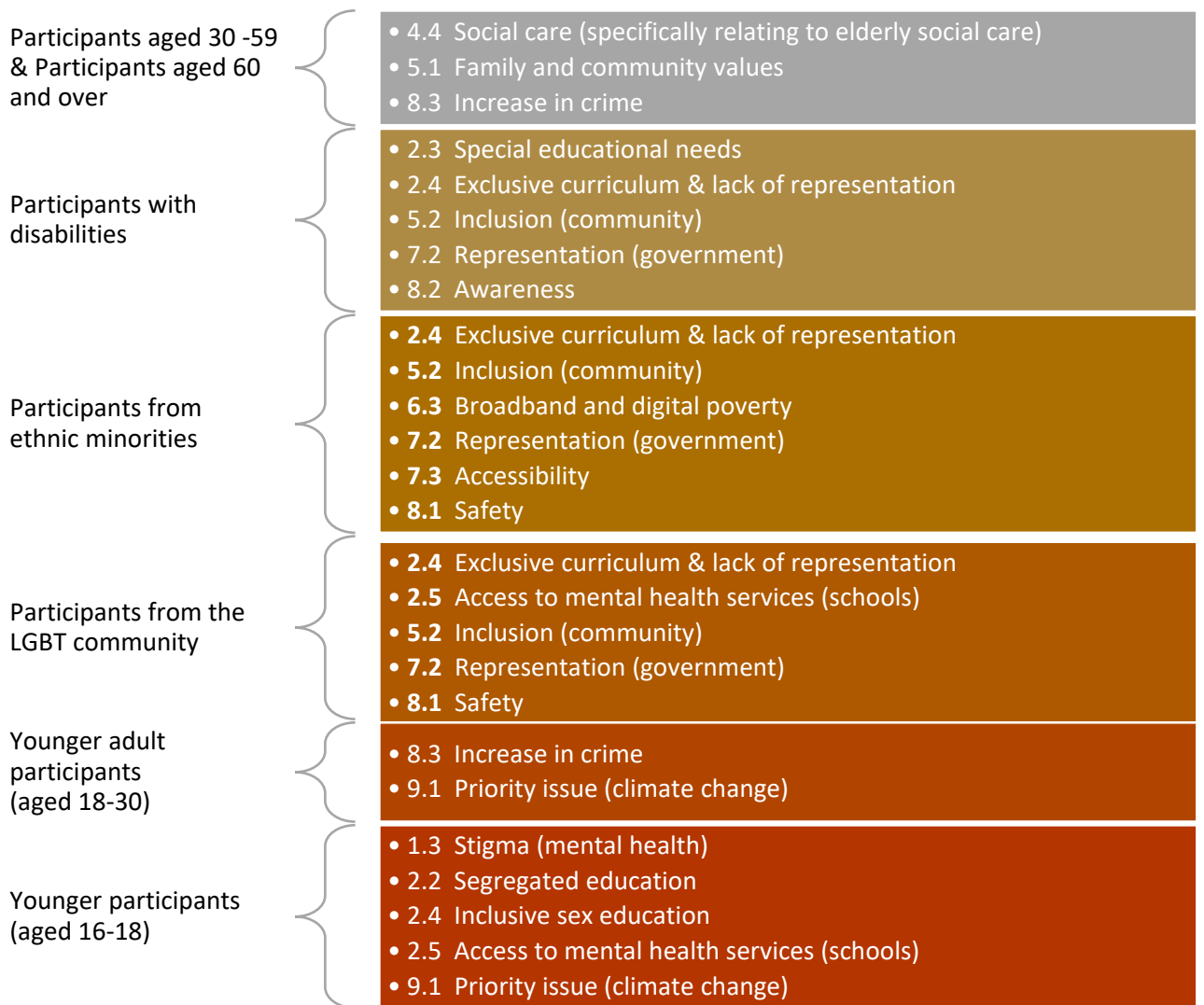


Mental health was the most prominent theme that emerged across all of the groups. It was evident from the discussions that mental health also has an impact across all of the other emerging themes.

Across groups, Education, Economy and Healthcare emerged as dominant themes, Community, Infrastructure, Government, Crime and Environment emerged as common themes.

Within each theme a number of sub-themes emerged, some of which were 'group specific' and are outlined in **Figure 2**.

Figure 2: Specific issues emerging from the Thematic Framework



METHODOLOGY

The reported findings are based on 10 discussion groups with adults and young people, a total of 51 participants.

The discussions took place between October 2020 and November 2020.

During this time, restrictions due to the coronavirus pandemic (Covid-19) were in place and therefore, Covid-19 was very much at the forefront of people's minds.

We aimed to capture a broad spectrum of views and experiences. We used a dual approach for recruitment;

- Participants from the general population – we focused on targeted demographics, age, sex and geographical location (across all 11 Local District Councils in Northern Ireland).
- Younger participants, participants with disabilities, participants from ethnic minorities and participants from the LGBT community – we worked with representative organisations from the Third Sector to organise the group discussions and we are grateful to them all for their support. Specifically NICRE, The Rainbow Project and Disability Action NI.
- For the younger participants, we worked with an established children's panel set up by NICCY to ensure that participants would be accustomed to and comfortable with speaking in front of one another.

Due to the Covid-19 restrictions in place during fieldwork, the discussion groups were facilitated via Zoom. The Discussion Guide is available to view [here](#).

Following fieldwork, we conducted a thematic analysis, producing themes (prominent, dominant and common) and sub-themes.

In the findings and commentary, themes have been explored to illustrate the differences across groups. For general population groups, young people refers to those aged 16-18, younger adults refers to those aged 18-30 and older adults refers to those aged 30 and over.

LIMITATIONS

- Due to the small sample size, the findings may not be representative of the views and opinions of the general population.
- Using established groups means there is less control over individual characteristics such as age, sex and geographical location.
- The fieldwork was carried out whilst restrictions were in place due to Covid-19. Consideration should be given that Covid-19 and its impact is at the forefront of everyone's mind.
- The discussion groups were facilitated online (due to the Covid-19 restrictions in place) and therefore we aimed for a smaller number of participants per group (max

6) to provide each participant with the time and space to contribute to the discussion.

- The views and opinions of children (aged under 16) have not been included (due to time constraints). From previous research conducted by NICCY, we acknowledge that this paper will not capture the views and perspective of children. This is something that should be explored in any further research.
- The research aimed to include representation from people from ethnic minorities, people from the LGBT community and people with disabilities but acknowledge that the research did not reach saturation.

SAMPLE

Table 1: An overview of the characteristics of the achieved sample:

Group	Age Range	Number of Participants	Recruitment
1	18-30	6	Groups recruited by third party research recruiter
2	30-59	5	
3	30-59	5	
4	60+	5	
5	16-18	9	Group recruited by NICCY with young people
6	18+	6	Group recruited by Disability Action NI with people with disabilities
7	18+	4	Group recruited by The Rainbow Project with people from the LGBT community
8	18+	3	Groups recruited by NICRE with people from ethnic minorities
9	18+	5	
10	18+	3	

Groups 1-4

Recruitment sought a balance of age, sex and geographical location across all 11 Local Government Districts with an even split of Catholic/Protestant community background.

Groups 5-10

Using established groups from Third Sector organisations limited the extent to which we could obtain a balanced sample in terms of individual characteristics as this depended very much on the composition of the existing groups.

Recruitment for Group 5 was facilitated by the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People, with young people aged 16-18 from across Northern Ireland.

Recruitment for Group 6 was facilitated Rainbow Project with people from the LGBT community, aged 18 and over from across Northern Ireland.

Recruitment for Group 7 was facilitated by Disability Action NI with people with disabilities, aged 18 and over from across Northern Ireland.

Recruitment for Group 8, 9 and 10 was facilitated by Northern Ireland Council for Racial Equality (NICRE), with people from a range of ethnic groups, aged 18 and over from across Northern Ireland.

WHAT PEOPLE TOLD US

On completion of a thematic framework, nine themes emerged across groups. Within each theme there are a number of sub-themes which this report explores in detail.

1. Mental Health

Mental health was the most prominent theme that emerged across all of the groups.

It was very much an overarching theme and evident from the discussions with participants that a number of factors can have an impact on a person's mental health, well-being and their overall 'life satisfaction'.

Key concerns for participants were; the impact of social isolation and loneliness on mental health and well-being. The lack of support and access to counselling services, exacerbated by the lack of funding for mental health services. The need for education and awareness to help eradicate the stigma around mental health and preventative measures in an attempt to help people before they 'reach crisis point'. Participants also had concerns the impact Covid-19 is having on mental health and well-being, now and long-term.

It was perceived by some participants that mental health issues have stemmed from the failure to address the legacy of the troubles.

Some participants felt we are amid a 'mental health pandemic that is being overlooked'.

1.1. Social isolation and loneliness

Participants acknowledged that social isolation and feeling lonely can have a negative impact on a person's mental health. The use of social media and the lack of 'socialising' was thought to be a contributing factor.

Social isolation was also voiced by participants from ethnic minorities:

'people can feel isolated and lonely being so far away from their family and friends.....it can affect their mental health.....Covid-19 has made this even more difficult'

Participants from the LGBT community also highlighted that people from the LGBT community can even feel socially isolated within their own home, if their family are not accepting.

The risk of isolation also resonated with those participants with disabilities, due to physical and attitudinal barriers in society. They noted the need for a greater understanding and awareness of society as a whole on the value and contribution from people with disabilities. This lack of understanding often meant people with disabilities were 'talked to' rather than being involved in the conversation.

Those people within society that do not feel 'included' within the community, feel that they do not have the same opportunities or perhaps experience inequalities or discrimination can also feel socially isolated and lonely.

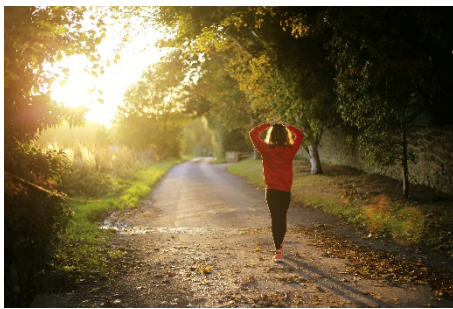
Relationships with friends, family and neighbours, participants felt were beneficial to the mental health and well-being of individuals and society as a whole.

1.2. Stigma

Younger participants felt there still was a stigma associated with mental health, especially amongst younger men. Education and awareness around mental health issues was very much needed, to encourage people to 'reach out' and talk to someone.

1.3. Prevention

Participants recognised the importance of education relating to preventive measures. Some participants felt the 'mental health cycle was too common a journey'. Mental health issues, addiction, prison and homelessness.



It was echoed by some participants that preventative measures were key, to help people avoid the 'downward spiral', before they reach 'crisis point'.

'why reach crisis point before there is an intervention.....people hit a crisis point before they can even access the services they need.'

Across the groups, participants felt very strongly the focus needs to be on 'prevention' in order to tackle mental health issues.

Younger participants felt the best place to deliver 'prevention' was within the school environment.

1.4. Support and access to counselling services

Younger participants felt support should be offered through safe and confidential counselling services in schools, having more counsellors and after school clubs. Participants from the LGBT community resonated with the need for these services in schools as people from the LGBT community may not have the support they need from their family, peers or teachers.

Some participants also expressed the view that there should be 'direct access to mental health services' as opposed to the GP being the gatekeeper.

Participants also raised concerns around inequalities accessing counselling services. Those that can afford to, can access private counselling services whilst those that can't are left with 'inadequate support'.

1.5. Funding

Participants raised concerns that the lack of support and access to counselling services was exacerbated by the lack of funding for mental health services. Mental health was 'not a

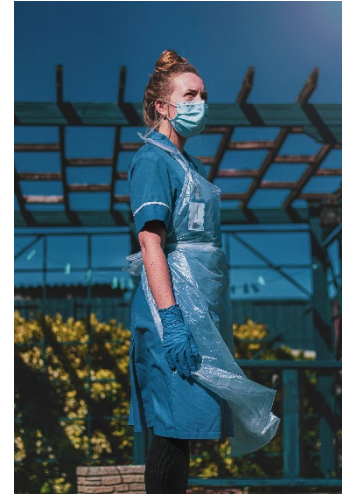
priority' in terms of resource. Underfunding over the decades meant that the service was not fit for purpose.

1.6. Covid-19

Participants felt that mental health has been exacerbated by Covid-19 and the restrictions in place. Not only the economic impact and the disruption to education, healthcare and other essential services, the negative effect social isolation and loneliness is having on people's mental health. People with existing mental health conditions and those that are now experiencing mental health issues.

Older participants worried not only for this generation but also for the next generation, their children and grandchildren.

Younger adult participants also acknowledged the 'stress of lockdown' and the impact it was having on mental health.



2. Education

Education was a dominant theme across groups with key concerns on educational attainment, segregated education, special educational needs, exclusive curriculums and lack of representation and difficulties accessing mental health services in schools.

2.1. Educational attainment

Participants across groups were concerned about the educational attainment of children from socially deprived backgrounds and the cycle of poverty. A key worry was a large proportion of young people leaving school early with little or no qualifications. Participants felt more could be done in schools to develop the aspirations of young people from deprived backgrounds to help them become more socially mobile.

Participants from the LGBT community noted that without an inclusive and safe school environment, young people from the LGBT community had poorer educational outcomes.

Participants from ethnic minorities noted that a lack of additional support for schoolchildren whose first language is not English, as well as a lack of awareness of cultural differences meant children from ethnic minorities were not reaching their full potential.

Participants also were worried that young people from deprived backgrounds were at risk of falling further behind as they were unable to access devices or broadband for remote learning.

2.2. Segregated education

Across a number of groups, segregated education was a key concern but was particularly important to young people. The worry for many is it promoted divides across society and was a barrier to integration with many children reaching the age of 18 without having friendships or any real interaction with someone from a community background other than their own. For participants from ethnic minorities, segregated education presents an additional barrier to cultural awareness and acceptance of their own ethnicity, and felt segregation promoted divisions and sectarianism.

2.3. Special educational needs (SEN)

A key concern for participants with children and participants with disabilities was the state of SEN education. The main worries was the identification of children's needs, accessing vital educational support and the overall timeliness and efficiency of the system. Participants with disabilities provided anecdotal evidence of teachers needing more support and training relating to pupils with special educational needs.

2.4. Exclusive curriculums and lack of representation

Participants from numerous groups voiced concerns at the lack of inclusivity in the curriculum, specifically in relation to cultural diversity across subjects as well as inclusive sex education.

Participants from ethnic minorities wanted more inclusivity across the curriculum and help young people learn about different cultures and traditions which would promote integration across different communities. Likewise, participants with disabilities wanted greater awareness in schools of both visible and invisible disabilities to promote kindness and acceptance. Both groups felt, awareness and learning in schools, would be shared in the home too.



Young people wanted more inclusive sex education and felt schools were getting it wrong in only teaching hetero sex education and wanted other sexualities included in the curriculum. They noted it was especially important for young people to access information in a safe and secure environment rather than relying on alternative unmoderated sources.

Participants from the LGBT community noted that young people need representation and must be able recognise and relate to sex education to avoid feeling more isolated, especially at a time when they may not have support in the home. The priority was creating inclusive and safe learning environment which should be built into the ETI inspection process, as it is in other areas of the UK.

2.5. Accessing Mental Health Services

A key concern for young people was the lack of mental health services in schools. Although schools provided counsellors, accessing the service in a safe, timely and confidential manner was difficult. They noted the importance of accessing services to help with stress and anxiety as well as building in wellbeing strategies across the curriculum to help reduce the stigma and encouraging young people, particularly boys to talk.

Young people also noted the difficulties over the last year, especially social isolation as schools switched to remote learning as part of the restrictions imposed to manage the Covid-19 pandemic.

Participants from the LGBT community were concerned at the lack of support in schools and difficulty in accessing counselling, especially in a time when young people from the LGBT community have questions about their own sexuality or face bullying in schools or their own home.

3. Economy

A dominant theme across groups was the issue of the Economy. Participants voiced concerns over the future of the Northern Ireland economy and felt it was likely to be worse affected by Brexit than economies in other UK regions. A key worry was a 'Brexit shock' would compound the difficulties of what they considered a very weak regional economy and impact employment, cost of living and job creation.

3.1. Employment

Both younger and older participants noted that there was less job security for younger people in today's workplace with zero hour and temporary contracts becoming the norm. A key concern was the far reaching consequences that goes beyond budgeting and financial planning difficulties - including the emotional impact, stress and anxiety of not being able to make ends meet.

Participants from ethnic minorities and participants from the LGBT community felt that the Covid-19 pandemic exposed and exacerbated workplace inequality, as people from these communities tended to be concentrated in sectors which had been worst affected by the pandemic such as hospitality and retail. The direct consequences of working in these sector meant they were more likely to have to go to work, more likely to be furloughed and less likely to receive a good level of sick pay.

A key concern for participants with disabilities was discrimination both during the recruitment process and in work which had consequences for their long term financial security including pension provision. Participants provided anecdotal evidence of SME employers assuming there will be additional costs of providing reasonable adjustments such

as ergonomic office equipment as well as time off for medical appointments. These barriers meant their skills and qualifications of equal merit were overlooked.

3.2. Cost of living

Stagnating wages and increasing costs of living was a key worry across groups but especially voiced by participants with children. Compared with other regions in the UK, participants felt Northern Ireland compared unfavourably with lower incomes, higher utility costs and less disposable income.

Older participants noted the increasing use of food banks as a sign that things were getting worse with people in full time employment struggling to cover the basic essentials such as food. The consequences of this was both mental and physical health inequalities. As well as an inability to access a nutritionally-adequate diet there was anxiety as well as emotional distress, embarrassment and shame. Due to current financial strains such as the cost of living and salaries, older participants felt '***Our sense of well-being and happiness is being eroded***'.

Participants from ethnic minorities noted a marked increase in food banks with community led initiatives looking after the most vulnerable from the community. A key worry was people 'falling through the cracks' and not knowing where to look for help if isolated in their community.

3.3. Affordable housing

Participants who were younger adults were concerned about the lack of affordable housing and the limited security of tenure in the privately rented sector compared to social housing or owner-occupation. Some participants felt that this would become an emerging priority in the future with the lack of availability of housing in Northern Ireland.

Participants from ethnic minorities noted that there were high proportions of people from minority ethnic groups in privately rented sector. A key priority for them was the ability to live peacefully and safely without fear of attacks on minority ethnic and migrant residents. In addition there was anecdotal evidence of landlords attaching additional terms to tenancies of minority ethnic groups and provide unsatisfactory information about tenancy rights.

Participants from the LGBT community noted the risk of homelessness for people from the community due to family breakdown. There was also anecdotal evidence of discrimination in social housing allocation for people from same-sex relationships who had to provide evidence of their relationships.

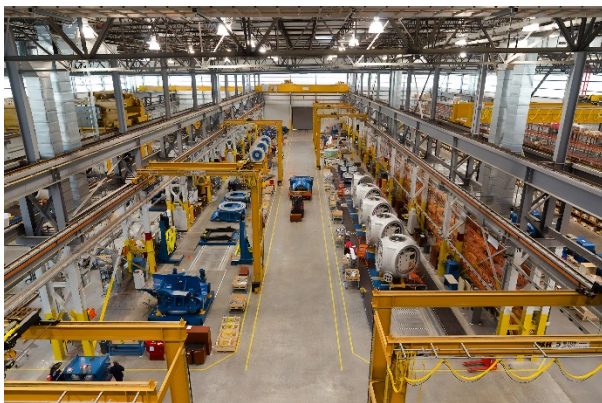
3.4. Childcare

A key worry for participants who had children was finding affordable childcare so they can work effectively – for some it was keeping women out of the workforce as child care challenges were a barrier to work, especially for single parent families who were at greater risk of social isolation.

Participants from ethnic minorities voiced worries at the pressure placed on mothers as the primary caregiver in the household and working disproportionately concentrated in low-paying jobs. Culturally and economically, it made more sense for mothers to stay at home.

3.5. Lack of job creation

Participants across groups noted a need for job creation and diversification of the economy into different industries to create a sustainable future for Northern Ireland that did not rely on public sector employment. In particular, Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) was identified as a key driver of Northern Ireland's economic prosperity. This in turn would create better paid jobs with greater security and prospects for employees.



Older participants wanted government to utilise our *'unique location as an opportunity to promote Northern Ireland to the rest of the world'* and create opportunities for those people living in Northern Ireland.

Participants from the LGBT community noted the contribution of FDI employers in creating inclusive workplaces and

promoting positive altitudinal shifts in society across Northern Ireland.

In particular, participants with disabilities wanted new jobs that promoted flexible working to support them in the workplace.

Younger people voiced concerns at the state of the labour market in Northern Ireland and voiced concerns that after university they would have to move to secure employment in their career field.

3.6. Qualifications & Training

Older participants were worried Northern Ireland were losing trade skills from the economy and wanted more opportunities for apprenticeships for young people to improve school leavers skills, wages and future career progression and encourage local economic growth. Younger participants resonated these concerns and wanted longer term training contracts to promote stability and security.

Across other groups, participants acknowledged that 'a job for life' was no longer the norm but more support was required to create opportunities for lifelong learning to drive economic prosperity by upskilling people into better paid jobs.

Participants from ethnic minority groups noted a key barrier for employment was a lack of recognition of qualifications from institutions in their home country. This meant many people from ethnic minorities were working in roles they were over qualified for and not meeting their full potential in the labour market.

4. Healthcare

Healthcare was a dominant theme across groups.

Whilst participants very much appreciated the NHS, especially during the current pandemic, they noted that healthcare was already in a crisis even before Covid-19. Their main concerns were; access to services and lengthy waiting lists, yet again exacerbated by the lack of funding. Social care of the elderly was a key concern for older participants.

4.1. Access to services

Participants expressed concerns around the difficulties accessing some healthcare services. To address this issue, some participants felt services needed to be 'streamlined' in order to simplify access as well as 'localising services'.

The need for more community led services and less of a reliance on consultant led services was highlighted by some participants.

Participants from the LGBT community expressed their concerns around the lack of comprehensive trans healthcare across Northern Ireland. Services have been on hold since 2018 due to limited resources and a lack of specialist staff, creating long waiting lists. Currently there is no provision for most surgery in Northern Ireland with most surgery being performed in England and funded by the NHS.



4.2. Lengthy waiting lists

Lengthy waiting lists caused concern among participants with the acknowledgement of the number of reduced services due to Covid-19 and the serious impact it is having on waiting lists.

Some participants felt the waiting list statistics do not adequately illustrate the consequences. The reality for some of those people on the waiting lists is that 'their conditions may be getting worse or perhaps they are on medication to manage the pain'. This can have implications on other aspects of their life such as employment and feelings of social isolation.

4.3. Funding and privatisation

Participants also expressed their concerns over the lack of funding for the NHS. Some participants felt it was 'too top heavy' with more investment needed in front line staff.

Privatisation was also a 'fear' for some participants. With lengthy waiting lists, some patients are 'going private':

'we are almost moving into the expectation that people should pay privately if they can.....affording to go private doesn't make services more accessible'

4.4. Social Care

A worry for older participants was social care relating specifically to the elderly. Concerns focused mainly on the costs associated with caring for the elderly, with 'some people having to sell their house' to pay nursing home fees, causing additional stress and anxiety for families.

5. Community

Community emerged as a common theme across groups, but most dominant for participants from ethnic minorities, participants with disabilities and participants from the LGBT community.

Key concerns for participants were; the importance of family and community values within society, inclusion and segregation. Participants noted the importance of social activities as a way to encourage inclusion and social cohesion within society.

5.1. Family and community values

In comparison to 10/20 years ago, older participants felt;

'we are losing our family and community values....people are becoming more isolated....especially in a small village, people keep themselves to themselves'

The fast pace of life, 'the rat-race', older participants felt contributed to the lack of free time some people have to engage with people in their community or talk to their neighbours.

Some participants felt we are living in a different society now, 'everything is PC' and there was a lack of respect among the younger generation. There was discussion around 'parents setting examples' and 'children should know the concept of what is right and wrong'.

Among the older age groups, participants expressed the need for people to talk, engage with each other and within their community, with some suggestions for creating a 'feel-good NI':

'People should feel prouder.....have a sense of pride in our communities and in our own families'.

5.2. Inclusion

Participants from ethnic minorities, participants with a disability and participants from the LGBT community strongly emphasized the importance that people from minority groups should feel 'included', 'involved' and 'integrated' within the community. Those participants



felt this could be achieved through education and awareness; of different cultures and traditions across ethnicities, gender identities and disabilities (visible and invisible). Having a focus on 'changing the mind set' and attitudes of people within the community towards those people from minority groups and creating 'safe inclusive environments'. A strong sense of the need for integration across society, regardless of a person's

background.

'We should celebrate people based on their individual identity'

5.3. Segregation

In terms of segregation, older participants felt we have come a long way, however younger participants felt much more progress was needed to overcome the division within our community.

5.4. Social activities

Younger participants recognised the importance and the value of social activities and clubs outside of school. A mechanism for delivering cross community programmes and encouraging integration within the community.

This also resonated with participants from ethnic minorities and how sporting activities in particular can encourage engagement and integration within communities.

Older participants suggested taking up a hobby to help people achieve a 'work/life balance'. They felt everything was 'fast-paced' and very much 'at your fingertips' within society. People were in a 'rat race'.

'Covid-19 slowed the 'rat race' down but you can slowly see it coming back again'.

Older participants noted that people needed 'more free-time' and to socialise, to get away from the rat-race.

6. Infrastructure

Infrastructure was a common theme across groups. Key concerns for participants were; investment and accessibility, public transport and broadband and digital poverty.

6.1. Investment and Accessibility

The main concern was the lack of infrastructure investment across Northern Ireland with participants noting that the state of the roads had deteriorated over the last 20 years.

Participants from rural areas noted the need for better investment in infrastructure for a balanced regional economy and accessibility to services - participants from the LGBT community noted the importance of accessibility in allowing people to access important health services which tended to be concentrated in Belfast.

6.2. Public Transport

Another key concern was public transport – both in terms of accessibility and value for money. Younger people wanted better connected services that were more environmentally friendly. Participants with disabilities noted the importance of public transport for people unable to drive. Participants from the LGBT community noted Transgender people in particular had safety concerns on public transport and felt transport workers could benefit from awareness and inclusivity training.

6.3. Broadband & Digital Poverty

Participants across groups noted the growing importance of fast, reliable broadband internet access, which is indispensable for day-to-day activities and critical for the competitiveness and viability of rural businesses.

A key concern for ethnic minorities was digital poverty and not being able to access the internet. The results of this is far reaching – there is a risk of isolation at not being in touch with family and loved ones. As restrictions were imposed as part of coronavirus social distancing measures, children were unable to access the same online learning resources as families who do have access to IT.

7. Government

Government emerged as a common theme across groups. Key concerns for participants were; the lack of trust in government and very much the need for strong leadership, the lack of 'inclusion' and representation of minority groups and barriers for minority groups accessing services.

7.1. Trust

Participants felt that people have lost trust, 'in our government and the British Government', identifying a need for 'strong leadership':

'We need a forward thinking government....a more mature government that address the needs in priority order rather than a balancing act'.

Some participants voiced their lack of respect for the Government mainly relating to politics:

'Government too stuck on green and orange'.

Participants acknowledged there are 'so many unknowns' and 'uncertainties' going forward, perhaps exasperated by BREXIT and Covid-19:

'Local and national government need to take on board our ever-changing society'

The Governments 'lack of transparency' and 'openness' were also concerns expressed by some participants.

7.2. Representation

Within this theme, participants with a disability strongly voiced the importance of 'involvement' across areas such as policies, planning and support.

'Involve people with a disability in conversations.....from the start, the whole way through.....be part of the driving force, the direction, issues raised and roll-out'

Rather than leaders having a 'perception of what is acceptable' or 'adapting a service', involve people with a disability, they can bring 'lived experiences' that should be respected and valued.

There was further discussion around the effectiveness of policies and support at 'grass-roots' level. The need for 'testing' – and are they actually 'delivering' and having a positive effect.

This was echoed by participants from ethnic minorities and participants from the LGBT community. As well as the need for government and leaders to set an example 'from top-down to grass-roots level' for equality and inclusion for those people from minority groups. Inclusivity should not be on an 'ad-hoc basis' or 'tokenistic', 'more people from minority groups should be in public positions'.

Participants from ethnic minorities felt strongly that equality and monitoring forms are not inclusive and there was a greater need for 'accountability' relating to the outcomes of policies.

7.3. Accessibility

Participants from ethnic minorities raised concerns relating to accessing services. As well as language barriers (if English is not their first language), they felt there can be additional hurdles. The administrative tasks involved in applications or registrations can be challenging

and they often have to seek advice and guidance from within the community with some anecdotal evidence this service is charged for, incurring additional and unnecessary costs.

8. Crime

A common theme across some groups was the issue of Crime. In particular, participants from ethnic minorities and participants from the LGBT community were worried about discrimination in the justice system and feeling safe in the areas they live.

8.1. Safety

Participants from ethnic minorities had themselves been then victim of hate crimes, with some having to move areas in fear of their own safety. Participants felt hate crimes have increased over the years and many crimes go unreported as in their experience the police response was inadequate. There was frustration at the police response to far right groups anti-refugee hate speech, which participants felt was a trigger for hate crimes.

People from the LGBT community were concerned for the safety of Transgender people with participants themselves having to relocate for their safety. They acknowledged that the police had made progress at a strategic level on policing with and for the LGBT community but policies were not being fully seen on the ground. Participants noted in some domestic abuse cases between same sex couples, police did not intervene.

8.2. Awareness

Participants with disabilities felt the police were inadequately trained in interacting with people who have disabilities and greater awareness and understanding was required to prevent police officers talking to relatives or family members rather than the person themselves. Inclusivity training was required to help police.

8.3. Increase in crime

Younger adults were concerned about the accessibility and prevalence of drugs, which they felt was on the increase. Older adults were concerned about an increase in anti-social behaviour and online crime.

9. Environment

A common theme across some groups was the issue of Environment with particular importance for both young people and younger adults.

9.1. Priority issue for Young People

Environment was a priority for both young people and younger adults who raised concerns about climate change and society's impact on the environment. They were extremely worried that the government were ignoring the problem and not adequately legislating to safeguard the environment for generations to come.

When prompted, groups with older adults identified it as *the* future big issue that will impact generations to come. They had noticed the positive aspects of less transport on the road as more people worked from home due to Covid-19 restrictions – they noted cleaner air, clearer skies and sightings of more native animals and birds.

9.2. Support and Education

In other groups including participants from ethnic minorities and participants with disabilities, concerns were raised at the lack of support available, particularly in regards to recycling. For some ethnic minorities, recycling is not common place in their home country and awareness and education is required. For people with disabilities, additional support may be required to facilitate recycling in the home.



Younger people were concerned not enough was being done by the government to educate society on climate change and the consequences it would have if people did not change their behaviour. They worried the lack of action from the government was causing irreversible damage on our environment and eco-system.

Solutions

Participants across groups suggested a number of solutions for tackling the 'big issues' within our society today.

Mental Health

- Mental health A&E
- More counsellors in schools/after school clubs and streamlined and direct, safer access including after school services and zoom calls at home to safeguard confidentiality

Education

- Mental health prevention as part of the curriculum including well-being strategies and managing stress
- Awareness programmes and inclusive curriculums across all subjects (specifically sex education and awareness and celebration of other cultures) to remove discrimination relating to age, disability, ethnicity, sexual orientation and gender identity.
- Greater impetus for integrated education and cross community programmes to learn about different communities, talk about similarities and shared priorities as part of everyday learning

Economy

- Affordable access to childcare
- Access to affordable housing
- More training opportunities – 'trade skills'
- Mandatory disability awareness training – across sectors – employers and employees
- Funding for SME's for ergonomic equipment to support people with disabilities
- City centre living/green space – change land use (convert office buildings into accommodation to increase supply)
- Inward/foreign investment – promote Northern Ireland and attract employers
- More employment opportunities for people from minority groups
- Further work on recognition of 'equivalent qualifications' from other countries

Healthcare

- Streamline services to assist with access and avoid dependency on consultant led services
- Introduce prescription charges

Community

- Organised activities such as sporting activities to encourage engagement and 'inclusion'

Government

- More people from minority groups in public positions for representation
- Greater consultation throughout legislation cycle to ensure voices of all people are listened to throughout the process and implementation

Environment

- Separate Department for Climate Change for decisive action
- Commissioner to audit companies and organisations against environmental legislation and objectives

FURTHER INFORMATION

Further research

The views and opinions of children (aged under 16) have not been included (due to time constraints). From previous research conducted by NICCY, we acknowledge that this paper will not capture the views and perspective of children. This is something that should be explored in any further research and we recommend consultation with NICCY and Playboard NI.

Contact

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Organisations who facilitated recruitment

Special thanks to:



ANNEX A: DISCUSSION GUIDE

75 minutes		
General Principles for Moderators		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask open, balanced and non-leading probes. • Obtain as much as possible spontaneously from general probes before following up with specific if not covered. • Explore comments fully by asking: why, anything else, anyone think something different. • Ensure all participants can contribute- look away from domineering and focus on less vocal. • Try to say as little as possible to encourage discussion among participants - probes only apply if they are not spontaneously brought up. • If participants go off on a tangent, discuss the areas as necessary but if irrelevant then bring back to probes. • Avoid answering participant queries, answer at the end or ask others to answer unless it is necessary to prevent irrelevant diversions or misconceptions. • Avoid discussions of hypothetical's relating to 'others', ask what respondents personally think/would do. • Fully explore concerns or doubts.
Preparation		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Email Zoom meeting details prior to groups • Moderator to manage initial 'check' in for connectivity prior to group with guidance document
1. Introduction	5 min	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thank you for participating. • Introduce moderators. • Housekeeping Phones on silent etc. <p>OVERVIEW We work for NISRA – the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency. We're independent researchers – our client is The Executive Office who are developing a framework for delivering services that reflects the wants, needs and concerns of the people of Northern Ireland.</p>

	<p>Why we're here today We would like to talk today to explore what you consider to be the most important issues in your life, what you worry about the most and how these issues could be tackled.</p> <p>We are conducting a number of these groups, we'll then bring it all together and report back to our client. Everything you say today is anonymous and confidential so please speak freely.</p> <p>Introduce focus group:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has anyone participated in a focus group before? • We may ask obvious questions as don't want to assume • Be as honest as you can <p>Ground rules:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No right/wrong so respect others' opinions • We want to hear your ideas, experiences and opinions, which are all valuable • Don't talk over each other • Please keep what is said confidential - do not bring it up outside of this (virtual) room
<p>1.1 Consent</p>	<p><u>Recruiter to manage consent prior to groups and Privacy Notice distributed to participants beforehand to understand how information will be processed.</u></p> <p>Note taking Confirmation of consent My co-moderator will be taking notes throughout the discussion and will note record any name or identifying information. All our findings will aggregated to ensure confidentiality and notes will be kept in accordance with GDPR.</p> <p>Any questions?</p> <p><u>If audio recording</u> Confirmation of consent</p>

		We want to record so can listen properly, will transcribe and keep it confidential & transcript will only be available for report writing, all confidential & recording will be deleted immediately after we have reviewed.
1.2 Warm up	5 min	INTRODUCTIONS <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Introduce self by way of example and ask respondents to introduce themselves with name, where they're from and their household
2. Societal Issues	10 min	In your opinion, what are some of the most pressing big issues facing our society today? List/Capture – briefly explore issue and impact on society as a whole Probe: How does this list compare to twenty years ago, twenty years in the future?
3. Important Issues	10 min	Thinking specifically about your day to day life, what are the most important issues for you? <i>If prompt needed, review societal list</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What issues do we need to add to the list? • What issues aren't particularly relevant to your day to day life? • What issues are <i>especially</i> relevant to your day to day life? • How so? <p>Explore differences across groups –</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How does this differ with age/location – in what way? <p>Review list and group themes around family, children, parents, employment, financial, health, education, crime</p> <p>Moderator note – if participants mention topical issues such as Brexit, COVID-19 etc., probe further to find out why this is an important issue for them (e.g. concerns around crime, job security, finances, healthcare etc.)</p>
4. Key worries	20 mins	Thinking about you and your family, what do you worry about most often?

		<p><i>If prompt needed, review list of issues, explore worries behind each and rank;</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Which of the issues we've talked about so far causes you the most worry? Which ones do you worry about least? How come? <p>In turn, explore;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In what way does the issue worry you? • What impact could it have on you and your family? • How do you see this changing in the next twenty years? <p>Moderator note – if participants mention topical issues such as Brexit, COVID-19 etc., probe further to find out why this is an important issue for them (e.g. concerns around crime, job security, finances, healthcare etc.)</p>
<p>5. You're in charge</p>	<p>20 mins</p>	<p>Imagine, you're in charge...</p> <p>We wake up one day, and you have the power to do something about these issues:</p> <p>What would you do?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where do you think resources need to be targeted? How come? <p>Review top 3 areas in turn;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What kind action would you take? • How would you implement it? • What impact would it have?
<p>6. Close</p>	<p>5 mins</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Any further thoughts or questions? • Ask co-moderator if anything to add/check? • This group has been really important as we will use what you have told us to • Reminder of confidentiality <p>Sources for further information:</p> <p>TEO PfG Consultation</p> <p>Thanks and goodbye.</p>