



# Ulster-Scots Community Network

[www.ulster-scots.com](http://www.ulster-scots.com)

## Ulster-Scots Community Network

Corn Exchange  
1 – 9 Victoria Street  
Belfast  
BT1 3GA

T: (028) 9043 6710  
E: [info@ulster-scots.com](mailto:info@ulster-scots.com)  
W: [www.ulster-scots.com](http://www.ulster-scots.com)

Dear Sir

### **Submission to the Independent Review of Education Provision**

The Ulster-Scots Community Network (USCN), formerly the Ulster-Scots Heritage Council, was founded in 1995 as an umbrella organisation for Ulster-Scots culture and language groups.

We do not have a particular view on the most appropriate structure for education in Northern Ireland and amongst our members there will probably be a variety of views. However, we do wish to make some observations in relation to the cultural dimension of education and on educational and cultural rights, from an Ulster-Scots perspective. Over the years we are aware that numerous submissions and representations have been made to the Department of Education by groups within the Ulster-Scots community based primarily on educational arguments and on cultural and linguistic rights – what is right for the child and what are the rights of the child – as well as the fundamental principle of equality.

### **A shared and better future**

Back in the 1990s, as we were developing our understanding of a shared and better future, we adopted the model of EDI – **Equity, Diversity and Interdependence**. It

has been central to our thinking and we still believe it has to be a key element in building a shared future in Northern Ireland.

**Equity** – the principle of equality is enshrined in law in the United Kingdom and is also enshrined in relevant international law, often alongside non-discrimination.

**Diversity** – we have a long-standing cultural diversity in Northern Ireland, with a plurality of cultural identities, including Ulster-Scots.

**Interdependence** – in any country there is a need to build social cohesion.

Alongside that we believe in the need for a **holistic approach to contentious or contended issues**, especially in a divided society.

## **Culture and education**

The education system in Northern Ireland is intended to ‘foster the intellectual, social, emotional, physical, **cultural**, moral and spiritual development of children’.

The word ‘cultural’ will include a broad understanding of cultures and cultural traditions but if the child is to be at the heart of it all, then it must include the cultural heritage or cultural traditions of the child, the family, and the cultural community.

This is in keeping with the **United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child** (UNCRC) Article 29c, which states that: ‘The education of the child shall be directed to **the development of respect for the child's parents, his or her own cultural identity**, language and values ...’

*A Language for Life*, otherwise known as the *Bullock Report*, was published in 1975 and was the report of the committee of inquiry, appointed by the Secretary of State for Education and Science, under the chairmanship of Sir Alan Bullock. The report stated: ‘No pupil should be expected to cast off the **language and culture of the home** as he crosses the school threshold, nor to live and act as though school and home represent two totally separate and different cultures which have to be kept firmly apart. Schools teach things that are believed to be of value and so what is included in the life of school is affirmed as being of value. On the other hand, schools do not teach things that are perceived to be of lesser value or no value. If the cultural traditions of the children and their families and community are excluded from the school, this teaches the children that their cultural traditions are of lesser value, which is detrimental to the children.

**‘A strong cultural identity is important to a child’s wellbeing.** Having a strong sense of their own cultural history and traditions helps children build a positive cultural identity for themselves, gives them a sense of belonging and self-esteem and supports their overall wellbeing.’ [Kids Matter, Australia]

## **Cultural and educational rights**

Education plays an important role in the preservation and inter-generational transmission of any cultural tradition

We were encouraged when the UK government recognised the Ulster-Scots language as a regional or minority language under the **European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages** (ECRML). That was in 1999 but we have not yet seen the implementation of the obligations set out in Part II of the charter, including:

- The need for resolute action to promote such languages.
- The provision of appropriate forms and means for the teaching and study of such languages at all appropriate stages.

We also note the references in **New Decade – New Approach** to (1) a duty being placed on the Department of Education in relation to Ulster-Scots and (2) the commitment by the UK government to recognise the Ulster-Scots community as a ‘national minority’ under the **Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities** (FCNM), which was adopted by the Council of Europe in 1994 and came into force in the United Kingdom on 1 May 1998, three weeks after the signing of the Belfast Agreement.

We welcome such recognition for the Ulster-Scots as a ‘national minority’ within the United Kingdom. It is something that we have advocated since 1999 and would follow on from the recognition of the Cornish as a ‘national minority’ within the United Kingdom, which came in 2014.

Within the Framework Convention there are important educational commitments relating to the preservation and intergenerational transmission of **the culture, history, language and religion** of national minorities. These are found in Articles 12, 13 and 14 and they are very extensive in their implications, even extending to the right of the members of a national minority to establish schools.

The UNCRC, ECRML and FCNM are all specified in New Decade – New Approach in the remit of an Ulster-Scots & Ulster-British commissioner.

We wish you well in your endeavours and would simply ask that in your deliberations and recommendations you take account of the cultural aspect of education.

**All children have cultural rights and national minorities have cultural rights, and these rights should be delivered in a way that is equitable across all cultural traditions.**

Aye yers

David Gilliland  
Operations Director  
Ulster-Scots Community Network

