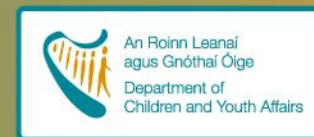


Department of Children and Youth Affairs



Bringing children and young people's voices into decision making; Children and Young People's Participation in decision making, the Irish experience

Key features of the Irish context:

A documented history of NOT listening to children and young people and a failure to put children at the centre of policy making processes and outcomes!!!

BUT

A decision and a commitment by Government to do things differently.

What we did to change thata story of almost 20 years commitment:

- **A specific national strategy on children and young people's participation in decision making**
- **A dedicated Unit at central Government level within a Government Department with a specific focus on children and young people**
- **Dedicated and ring fenced resources**
- **A theoretical framework – LUNDY MODEL**
- **A permanent, embedded and well supported local and national structure**
- **A commitment to engagement in documenting and evaluating work – best practice and contribution to the academic literature**
- **International policy drivers**

Children and young people's participation is a story of

- Developing and improving practice – MAKING IT REAL
- Political, legal, policy and strategic milestones / commitments / statements / signatures - MAKING IT POSSIBLE
- Intellectual and academic engagement - MAKING IT UNDERSTOOD



Development of the first National Strategy on Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-Making

Introduction and Context:

- Builds on National Children's Strategy – GOAL ONE, 2000
- One of the strategies under *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures: the National Policy Framework for Children and Young People (2014-2020)*, in which the voice of the child is a core principle and transformational goal
- Policy Framework Vision:
'For Ireland to be one of the best small countries in which to grow up and to raise a family and where the rights of all children and young people are respected, protected and fulfilled; where their voices are heard and where they are supported to realise their maximum potential now and in the future.'

Strategy Approach

- **Guided by the Article 12, UNCRC**
- **Takes account of transition to adulthood**
- **Focuses on children in the here and now as the citizens of today and not just the adults of tomorrow**
- **Collective and individual participation**
- **Lundy model of participation**
- **Recommendations from the EU Commission and Council of Europe**
- **Principles from the Council of Europe Recommendations CM/Rec(2012)2 of the Committee of Ministers**
- **Acknowledges Indicators from the Council of Europe draft Child Participation Assessment Tool**
- **Evidence based**

‘Voice’ is critical to the realisation of all other rights

The United Nations adopted the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1989

Ireland become a signatory to the UNCRC in 1992

UNCRC – the most ratified human rights convention (194 countries)

The Committee on the Rights of the Child has listed a number of rights as critical to the exercise of all other rights. These are the CRC Guiding Principles:

- **Elimination of discrimination (Article 2)**
- **The best interest of the child (Article 3)**
- **The right of the child to life, survival and development (Article 6)**
- **The right of the child to be heard (Article 12)**

General Comment Article 12 UNCRC

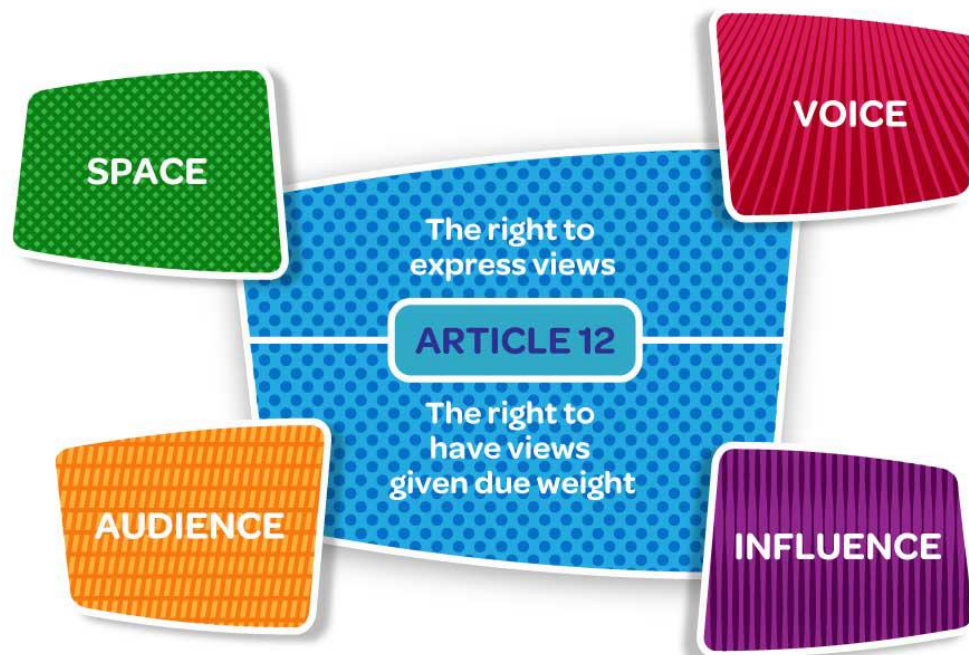
‘It is not necessary that the child has comprehensive knowledge of all aspects of the matter affecting him or her, but that she or he has sufficient understanding to be capable of appropriately forming her or his views on the matter.’

‘State Parties should carefully listen to children’s views wherever their perspective can enhance the quality of solutions’.

‘The more the child knows, has experienced and understands, the more the persons legally responsible for the child have to transform direction and guidance into reminders and advice and later to an exchange on an equal footing.’ (Evolving capacities)

‘It is important that Governments develop a direct relationship with children, not simply one mediated through non-governmental organisations or human rights institutions’.

Model of participation (Lundy)



This model provides a way of conceptualising Article 12 of the UNCRC which is intended to focus decision-makers on the distinct, albeit interrelated, elements of the provision. The four elements have a rational chronological order:

- **SPACE:** Children must be given safe, inclusive opportunities to form and express their view
- **VOICE:** Children must be facilitated to express their view
- **AUDIENCE:** The view must be listened to.
- **INFLUENCE:** The view must be acted upon, as appropriate.

Voice-model Checklist



Goal, Focus and Priorities of Strategy

- **Strategy Goal:** Children and young people will have a voice in their individual and collective lives across the five national outcome areas
- **Strategy Focus:** The everyday lives of children and young people and the places and spaces where they are entitled to have a voice on decisions that affect their lives
- **Strategy Objectives:**

Children and young people will have a voice in decision-making:

1. in their local communities
2. in early education, schools and the wider formal and non-formal education systems
3. that affects their health and wellbeing, including on the health and social services delivered to them
4. in the courts and legal system.

Additional Strategy objectives

- 5. effective leadership to champion and promote participation of children and young people**
- 6. development of education and training for professionals working with and on behalf of children and young people**
- 7. mainstreaming the participation of children and young people in the development of policy, legislation and research**

Key Strategy Action for the Department of Children and Youth Affairs

Establishment of a Participation Hub as a national centre for excellence on children and young people's participation in decision-making to:

- support implementation of the Strategy**
- champion and promote participation**
- develop and conduct training**
- document and disseminate learning**
- establish an online children's participation database**
- form strategic partnerships with organisations in developing and documenting best practice**

On-going work to support the permanent structures for children's participation:

- **Comhairle na nÓg**
- **Dail na nÓg**

Comhairle na nÓg: The 2016 Annual Report shows that:

- 3,842 young people participated in AGMs
- 984 young people were members of local Comhairles
- a total number of 639 meetings of Comhairles took place
- representation of 12-15 year olds was at 41% and
- all Comhairle reported implementation of a range of strategies to ensure the voice of seldom heard young people was included.

Comhairle na nÓg National Executive as the implementation body for DNN, very successful year on year participation initiatives.

So How Was School Today as the perfect example of this.

A Sample of Consultations

- **Healthy Lifestyles – Have your Say**
- **Heritage Council**
- **Cruinniú na nÓg**
- **Oberstown Standards**
- **Adoption**
- **Garda Youth Diversion Programme**
- **So, How was School Today?**
- **LGBTI+ National Youth Strategy**

Key Findings

80% response rate

82% of the agreed actions reaching completion or in progress

Very broad range of policy areas are actively implementing the strategy

Good spread across the age ranges

Mix of methodological approaches

Strong follow through to publication of findings and influence on policy

Legislation, policy development, service provision, funding streams and review/evaluation/reporting all included in the focus of the participation

Mid Term Review of Participation Strategy

- Review of relevance of contents of strategy
- Review of outcomes to date on seven objectives
- Review of process and implementation structure; how to improve inclusion of NGO sector
- Review of awareness and visibility amongst stakeholders
- Key commitments and course of action for phase 2.



An Roinn Leanaí
agus Gnóthaí Óige
Department of Children
and Youth Affairs

WHAT IS COMHAIRLE NA NÓG?

- Comhairle na nÓg are local councils for children and young people
- Voice on the development of local policies and services
- One in every Local Authority area
- Supported by DCYA via Comhairle na nÓg Development Fund and Participation Support Team.



An Roinn Leanaí
agus Gnóthaí Óige
Department of Children
and Youth Affairs

How do their voices get heard?

- Comhairle na nÓg member's select and work on topics of most importance to young people in their area e.g Use Your Brain
- Comhairle na nÓg is a consultative forum for adult decision-makers in the locality



An Roinn Leanaí
agus Gnóthaí Óige
Department of Children
and Youth Affairs

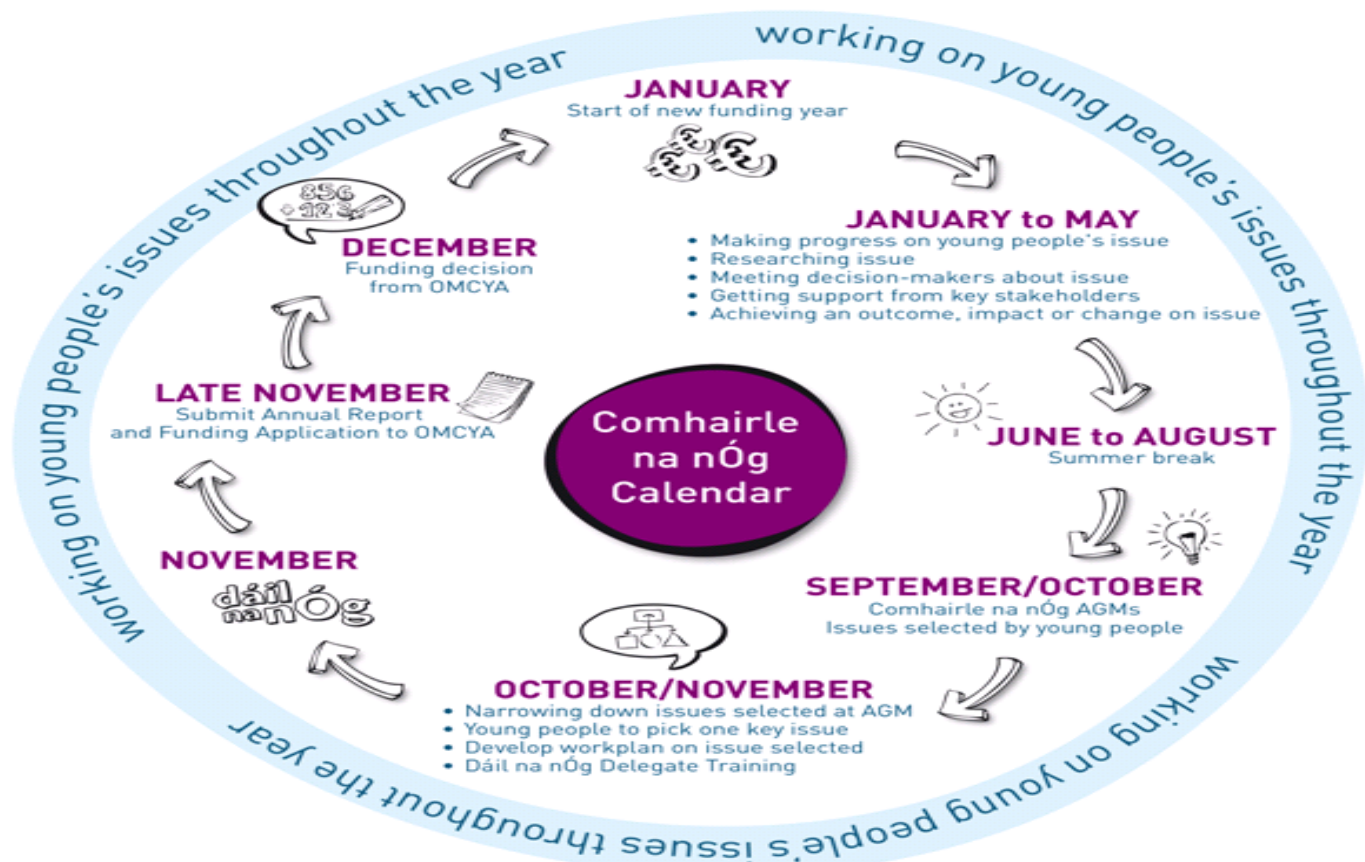
Role of the Local Authority

- Responsible for day to day running of Comhairle na nÓg
- Co-funding and hosting Steering Committee
- Link to decision-makers within the local authority – ensure the young people's views are listened to and have influence
- Key role in creating awareness about Comhairle na nÓg and the topics being currently working on in the local area.
- Youth Consultation on key issues with the county
- Link in with other agencies e.g CYSPC/LCDC/SPC's



An Roinn Leanaí
agus Gnóthaí Óige
Department of Children
and Youth Affairs

Comhairle na nÓg Lifecycle





An Roinn Leanaí
agus Gnóthaí Óige
Department of Children
and Youth Affairs

Some Statistics

Comhairle na nÓg: The recent Annual Report shows that:

3,842 young people participated in AGMs

984 young people were members of local Comhairles

a total number of 639 meetings of Comhairles took place

representation of 12-15 year olds was at 41% and

all Comhairles reported implementation of a range of strategies to ensure the voice of seldom heard young people was included.



An Roinn Leanaí
agus Gnóthaí Óige
Department of Children
and Youth Affairs

What is Dáil na nÓg

- Dail na nÓg is the national youth parliament for 12-18 year-olds. It is a biennial event, to which 200 representatives from the 31 Comhairle na nÓg are elected as delegates.
- The DCYA funds and oversees Dáil na nÓg, which is hosted by the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs.
- The topics discussed at Dáil na nÓg are chosen by young people themselves in the 31 Comhairle na nÓg. Recommendations from Dáil na nÓg are followed-up by the Comhairle na nÓg National Executive for the following two years.



An Roinn Leanaí
agus Gnóthaí Óige
Department of Children
and Youth Affairs

What is Comhairle na nÓg National Executive

- One representative from each of the 31 Comhairlí na nÓg is elected to the Comhairle na nÓg National Executive, which follows up on the recommendations from Dáil na nÓg to make changes for young people in those areas.
- The National Executive has a term of office of two years and meets once a month. The National Executive is facilitated and supported by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs , Foróige and Youth Work Ireland, who ensure that they get the opportunity to engage with appropriate Ministers, policy-makers, Oireachtas Committees and other decision-makers.



An Roinn Leanaí
agus Gnóthaí Óige
Department of Children
and Youth Affairs

Comhairle na nÓg Showcase

- Every second year 500 young people attend the Comhairle na nÓg Showcase event with approximately 15 young people from every Comhairle na nÓg in attendance.
- The purpose of the events is to give young members of Comhairle na nÓg an opportunity to showcase their work and to network with one another, to share information with other young people in their region about what is working well in Comhairle na nÓg and to voice their opinions on developing and improving Comhairle na nÓg.

Conclusion: Implementation and Oversight

- **Leadership will continue to come from the DCYA Participation Unit in collaboration with other key DCYA units, including Research, Early Years and Youth Affairs**
- **The Participation Hub will be a resource and support for all stakeholders in implementing this strategy**
- **The Participation Strategy will be implemented under the structures established for implementation of *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures***

References

- *An audit of children and young people's Participation in Decision-making* (2011) (www.dcy.gov.ie)
- *Life as a Child and Young Person in Ireland: Report of a Consultation with children and young people* (2012) (www.dcy.gov.ie)
- *Council of Europe Recommendation CM/Rec(2012)2 of the Committee of Ministers* (www.coe.int)
- *Better Outcomes Brighter Futures: National Policy Framework for Children and Young People* (2014-2020) (www.dcy.gov.ie)
- *Council of Europe Child Participation Assessment Tool* (2014) (www.coe.int)
- *Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children* (2011) (www.dcy.gov.ie)
- *National Strategy on Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-making* (2015-2020) (www.dcy.gov.ie)
- *The Health Behaviours in School-Aged Children* (HBSC) 2014 (<http://health.gov.ie/blog/publications/the-health-behaviours-in-school-children-hbsc-survey-2014/>)
- *Children's participation online database* (2016) (www.dcy.gov.ie)

- [https://wetransfer.com/downloads/541dcffcc
a0465b9f20c6b7a3190c8ba20190110130133/
fa4ccc3a25aa37f7d587d41ba80d8781201901
10130133/c1c17a](https://wetransfer.com/downloads/541dcffcc
a0465b9f20c6b7a3190c8ba20190110130133/
fa4ccc3a25aa37f7d587d41ba80d8781201901
10130133/c1c17a)