



WHAT WE THINK

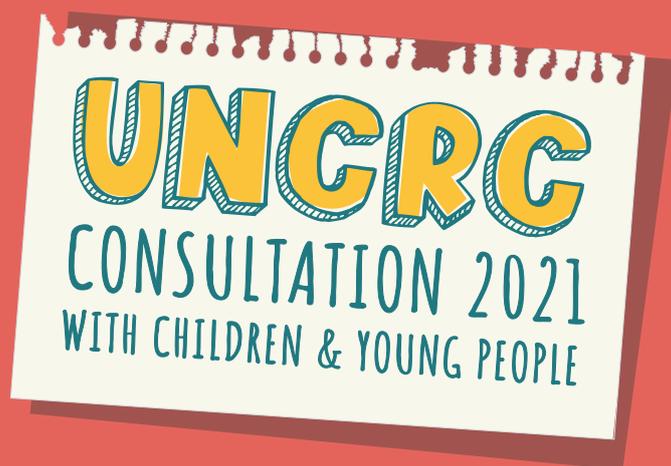
A review of past consultations
with children and young
people as part of the UNCRC
reporting process



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UNGRC

CONSULTATION 2021
WITH CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE



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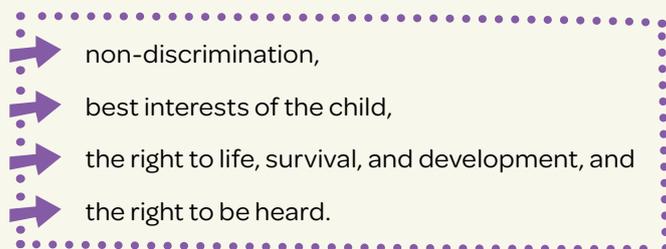
Abbreviations

AAI	Adoption Authority of Ireland
ASD	Autistic Spectrum Disorder
CCLCRPU	Child Care Legislation and Children's Rights Policy Unit
CRC	Committee on the Rights of the Child
CSPE	Civic, Social and Political Education
DAHG	Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht
DCYA	Department of Children and Youth Affairs (Previous title of DCEDIY)
DCEDIY	Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth
DES	Department of Education and Science
DJE	Department of Justice and Equality
DH	Department of Health
EPA	Environmental Protection Agency
EPIC	Empowering People in Care
ESD	Education for Sustainable Development
GAL	Guardian <i>Ad Litem</i>
GYDP	Garda Youth Diversion Project
IYJS	Irish Youth Justice Service
LGBTI+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex Plus
LOIPR	List of Issues Prior to Reporting
LRCI	Law Reform Commission Ireland
RIA	Reception and Integration Agency
SPHE	Social, Personal and Health Education
THC	The Heritage Council
UNCRPD	United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
UNCRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
UPR	Universal Periodic Review
VFMPR	Value for Money Policy Review



Executive Summary

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), which is the most widely ratified human rights treaty in the world, was adopted in 1989. The UNCRC encompasses a wide range of rights concerning children including four principles:

- 
- non-discrimination,
 - best interests of the child,
 - the right to life, survival, and development, and
 - the right to be heard.

The latter is important in terms of providing a mandate for seeking and considering the views of children and young people in decision-making, policy-making, and preparation of laws as well as their evaluation.

The UNCRC was ratified by Ireland in 1992. The Irish Government submits regular reports to the Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC) which oversees the process to ascertain each state's progress towards full implementation of the UNCRC into domestic law, policy and practice, including how the State seeks out and listens to the voice of the child.

As part of preparation for the combined 5th and 6th State report to the CRC, the DCEDIY commissioned this review of consultations published since the last State report:

- (a) identify key issues raised by Children and Young People (CYP) pertaining to the UNCRC,
- (b) provide an overview of the emerging themes relevant to the implementation of rights of children (including specific groups) and
- (c) highlight any gaps raised by the consultations.

In total, 20 consultations with 14,567 children and young people aged between 5 and 26 were included in this review. Children and young people shared their experiences of specific services such as the child care system, adoption regulation, Direct Provision, and the Garda Youth Diversion Projects. Consultations explored young people's views on LGBTI+ issues, school/education/and after-school care, as well as their thoughts on education for sustainable development, health (healthy weight and mental health), internet safety, leisure, heritage and culture, and the environment. The rights invoked and explored in the consultations were grouped under the following UNCRC headings: General Principles; Civil Rights and Freedoms; Violence against Children; Family Environment and Alternative Care; Basic Health and Welfare; Education, Leisure and Cultural Activities; and Special Protection Measures.

General principles

All of the consultations reviewed are examples of how the State sought to secure the views of the child (**Article 12**) and support them to share their thoughts freely (**Article 13**) as outlined in Policy documents such as *'Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures'* and *'The National Strategy on Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-Making 2015-2020'*. Some of the consultations drew attention to the need to provide services that do not stigmatise or stereotype the young people who use them (e.g., young people in youth justice settings, young people using mental health services) and to address discrimination e.g., LGBTI+ consultation (Doc #1) which includes recommendations on how discrimination might be addressed. Some consultations explored the views of the child in a family law context (adoption, child care proceedings, Guardian *Ad Litem* (GAL) and made recommendations such as having better information about proceedings, greater involvement in decisions around their care and the need to make both adoption and care proceedings more child-friendly (Doc #4, Doc #18, Doc #19).

Civil rights and freedoms

Two consultations sought to gain the views of young people in care (Doc #18, Doc #19) and one consulted with young people who had been adopted (Doc #4). As well as providing opportunities to express their opinion (**Article 12** and **Article 13**), these consultations have messages relevant to **Article 8** (Right to Identity), **Article 16** (Right to Privacy) and **Articles 20 and 21** (Children without families; Children who are adopted). The LGBTI+ consultation (Doc #1) identified the need for improved gender recognition for under 18s, and the need for the inclusion of non-binary within the Gender Recognition Act. On the consultation on Sustainable Development, young people's suggestions included the need for more information about laws, cultures and rights across the world, alongside topics such as exploitation of developing countries by first world countries. Children and young people have made it clear that information on digital safety is imperative (Doc #7 and Doc #13) as is more accessible information about self-care during the COVID-19 pandemic (Doc #17).

Violence against children

Two of the consultations were with young people who have experience of the care system (Doc #18 and Doc #19), and who may have experienced neglect, abuse or violence. Key messages from these consultations included the need for more information and transparency about the care processes, and the desire to have a greater say in decision-making. Similarly, the consultation with children in Direct Provision (Doc #10) sought the views of young people who may be recovering from trauma (**Article 39**) – a number of these participants identified themselves as being at risk of sexual exploitation (**Article 34**) and highlighted the need for reform and improvements in the system to better protect children.

Family environment and alternative care

Three consultations involved children in the care system. Two consultations (Doc #18 and Doc #19) provided young people with opportunity to share their experience of the different stages of the care system, and to have a voice in decision-making in this regard. In the recent consultation to inform the review of the Child Care Act, young people made suggestions on ways to improve access to birth parents and siblings. This consultation also highlighted the importance of removing barriers to enable a more normal or typical home and school life. In one consultation (Doc #4) which sought young people's views on adoption regulations, participants made recommendations about how to improve the participation of young people in adoption proceedings.

Basic health and welfare

Children and young people are entitled to a standard of living including quality health care. However, it was clear from three consultations (Doc #1, Doc #12, Doc #17) that sexual health, mental health and adolescent health in general is not being sufficiently addressed. For example, in one of the consultations (Doc #12), young people suggested ways to improve health and wellbeing by increasing access to support groups and mental health services (e.g., Mindspace or Jigsaw). In the same consultation, young people suggested the concept of 'Nutrition Clinics' to encourage young people to have healthy lifestyles.

Across several consultations (Doc #2, Doc #9, Doc #20), children and young people raised concerns about the climate crisis and its impact on health, with recommendations for Government action to improve transport (e.g., better public transport/increased use of bicycles) as well as action to reduce plastic and reduce waste. They also made recommendations to promote behaviour change (e.g., recycling and less waste).

Education, leisure and cultural activities

In four consultations (Doc #1, Doc #5, Doc #13, Doc #9), concerns were expressed about the need to improve children and young people's learning experiences with reference to: exam stress; the influence of the Church in Irish schools; as well as need to improve sex education and LGBTI+ awareness. In the consultation about after-school activities, play (particularly outdoor play) was the main activity that children said they liked to do after school (Doc #8). Nine out of ten children expressed dislike of having to go to after-school care and said they would prefer to be at home or with friends or relatives after school.

A consultation designed to secure children's and young people's views on Heritage and Cultural activities explored how these could be made more accessible and inclusive (Doc #2) and another consultation (Doc #3) explored what creative activities children and young people would like to do in school, at home and with friends.

Special protection measures

In the consultation about Direct Provision, participants were asked what they liked, disliked and what they would change. Children and young people said they appreciated some of the facilities (e.g., the play and recreation facilities and homework clubs if they were fit for purpose), and some of the staff who were respectful, kind, and caring. Some young people said they also experienced a sense of community and access to friends that living communally sometimes enabled.

However, the lived experiences of all of the children highlighted a number of concerns about the Direct Provision system including the concept itself which is an abnormal setting for family life and family relationships, the length of time families have to stay in this system (often years), cramped and substandard accommodation, families not being allowed to cook their own food and being provided with poor quality food, the experience of disrespect from some staff towards the children and their parents, the humiliation of families not being able to earn their living and children not having any money and the inappropriate behaviour of some of the single men towards the children in the communal accommodation. Children spoke about the need to speed up the application approval process so that themselves and their families could get on with their lives (Doc #10).

Messages for Future Consultations



Focus

Many of the consultations included in this review were designed to capture the views of the general population of children and young people based on their experiences rather than their identity or group membership. In many cases, the young people were recruited from Comhairle na nÓg (who are required to adopt mechanisms to include seldom-heard young people).

As noted above, among the 20 consultations reviewed, there are examples of consultations with specific groups of seldom-heard children and young people, such as LGBTI+ young people (Doc #1); young people who have been adopted (Doc #4); children in Direct Provision (Doc #10); those who have experience of the juvenile justice system (Doc #15); and young people in care (Doc #18, Doc #19). The consultation to inform the Targeted Youth Funding Scheme (Doc #16) paid particular

attention to securing the views of a large number of seldom-heard children and young people including those with mental health and substance misuse issues, young people in care, Islamic young people, young carers, and young people with disabilities.

One of the aims of this review was to highlight any gaps in terms of the focus of the consultations vis-à-vis the range of rights of particular at-risk groups enshrined in the Convention. Whilst the views of some groups of seldom-heard children have been secured on specific issues and topics, future consultations might consider a specific focus on the following groups:

- children/young people with disabilities (physical/sensory/learning)
- children/young people who are experiencing or have experienced homelessness
- children/young people from minority ethnic groups and children from the Traveller community
- young carers

Follow-up

Acknowledging the fact that the reports on the consultations are just one stage of the participation cycle and are sometimes prepared at the early stage of decision-making, it would be useful to have some mechanism or process to document the potential or actual influence of the young people's voices in decision-making and how this will be fed back to the children and young people as part of the participation cycle. In this way, children and young people can be reassured that their views are valued and that the State is actively listening to their voices.

Report structure

SECTION ONE

Provides a background to the review and methodology.

SECTION TWO

Provides an overview of the 20 reports and the key issues covered in the consultations, methodologies used, and the involvement of children/young people in the consultation design and dissemination of the findings.

SECTION THREE

Presents summaries of each of the 20 reports.

SECTION FOUR

Provides an overview of the emerging themes relating to implementation of the rights of children.

SECTION FIVE

Messages for future consultations.



The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child is a comprehensive, internationally binding agreement on the rights of children, which was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1989. It is the most widely ratified human rights treaty in history.



SECTION ONE



The (UNCRC) is the major human rights treaty that sets out specific rights of children. The UNCRC has 54 articles in total. Articles 1–41 outline the specific rights that children have and Articles 42–54 explain how governments must safeguard these rights and ensure that everyone knows that all children have these rights (see Appendix 1 for a one-page overview of the UNCRC). Each of the 41 Articles describes a different type of right. It is important to note that the rights listed in the UNCRC are not ranked in order of importance and that they interact with one another to form one integrated set of rights. These articles tend to be grouped together under the following themes as outlined by the Children’s Rights Alliance¹:

- 1 Survival rights:** include the child’s right to life and the needs that are most basic to existence, such as nutrition, shelter, an adequate living standard, and access to medical services.
- 2 Development rights:** include the right to education, play, leisure, cultural activities, access to information, and freedom of thought, conscience and religion.
- 3 Protection rights:** ensure children are protected from all forms of abuse, neglect and exploitation, including special care for refugee children; safeguards for children in the criminal justice system; protection for children in employment; protection and rehabilitation for children who have suffered exploitation or abuse of any kind.
- 4 Participation rights:** encompass children’s freedom to express opinions, to have a say in matters affecting their own lives, to join associations and to assemble peacefully. As their capacities develop, children should have increasing opportunity to participate in the activities of society, in preparation for adulthood.

The UN Convention includes four articles known as ‘general principles’ which have special importance:

- ▶ that all the rights guaranteed by the UNCRC must be available to all children without discrimination of any kind (**Article 2**);
- ▶ that the best interests of the child must be a primary consideration in all actions concerning children (**Article 3**);
- ▶ that every child has the right to life, survival and development (**Article 6**); and
- ▶ that the child’s view must be considered and taken into account in all matters affecting him or her (**Article 12**).

Article 12 is of particular importance as it provides the mandate for ensuring the consideration of children’s views in relation to the development of policies and legislation and evaluation of same. The UN developed a General Comment on how State Parties should implement **Article 12** both in relation to groups of children as well as children as individuals².

Since the UNCRC was drafted, three additional related protocols known as *Optional Protocols* have also been developed which focus specifically on: the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography; the involvement of children in armed conflict; and a complaints mechanism for children (known as the Communications Procedure)³.

The Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC) monitors progress made by individual countries in incorporating the Convention into domestic law, policy and practice. This reporting process takes place approximately every five years and recently a new five step simplified reporting format has been devised⁴.

¹ <https://childrensrights.ie/childrens-rights-ireland/un-convention-rights-child>

² <https://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/crc/docs/AdvanceVersions/CRC-C-GC-12.pdf>

³ These are not the focus of this desk-based review.

⁴ <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/CRC/Pages/ReportingProcedure.aspx>

Ireland ratified the UNCRC in 1992. The Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY) has responsibility for co-ordinating the implementation of the UNCRC and oversees the production of Ireland's state report on progress made on this convention. The examination of Ireland's record under the UNCRC is a comprehensive process that covers all legislative, policy and operational measures concerning children, and takes into consideration the recommendations and issues raised by the CRC. Ireland is due to submit the next set of Reports (5 and 6) to the CRC by February 2022 taking into account the recent [List of Issues Prior to Reporting](#) document (CRC/C/IRL/QPR/5-6) issued on 18 November 2020. A key aspect of the upcoming State report on Ireland's progress in implementing the UNCRC, will be about the voice of the child and the input of children and young people in relation to the implementation of the wide range of rights enshrined in the Convention.

Evolving context of participation of children and young people in decision-making in Ireland

[Dáil na nÓg](#) (youth parliament) and [Comhairle na nÓg](#) (youth councils) were established in 2002 and 2003 respectively. The Department of Public Expenditure and Reform commissioned the University of Limerick to carry out a case study on Comhairle na nÓg in 2020 (Adshead, 2020) highlighting the impact of Comhairle na nÓg as a structure of effective representation of children and young people's voices locally and nationally to decision makers.

[A National Strategy for the Participation of Children and Young People in Decision-Making \(2015-2020\)](#) provided a cross-government action plan to ensure that children and young people's voices were included in decision-making in the places and spaces in which children lived their lives. The strategy sets out actions for:

- 
- government departments and agencies in local settings,
 - formal and informal education settings,
 - the courts and legal settings, and
 - health and social care settings.

The strategy also sets out enabling goals to ensure cross-government commitment to actions. Approximately 93% of agreed actions reached completion or were in progress by 2018 (DCYA, 2018).

In 2017, Hub na nÓg was established as a centre of excellence on the voice of children and young people in decision-making, to support government departments and agencies to achieve their objectives under the Strategy. In 2021, [a National Framework for Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-Making](#) was developed in collaboration with Professor Laura Lundy and a capacity building grant and training programme was designed to support the practice of children and young people's participation in everyday settings. Hub na nÓg have also commissioned a review on best practice in participation, the results of which are currently being compiled.

Context for the Desk Review

As part of the preparations for the next State Report to the CRC, DCEDIY has conducted a consultation with children and young people in relation to the implementation of the UNCRC. In addition to that, it has also commissioned this desk review of twenty consultations that have been undertaken with children and young people by the Department and/or Hub nÓg since the previous State Report was submitted (the [combined third and fourth periodic reports](#) CRC/C/IRL/3-4).

Aim of the Desk Review

The aim of the review is to capture key issues cutting across the various subjects under the Convention, as identified by children and young people, and produce a beneficial overview of implementing the rights of children under different domains including advancing the rights of specific groups. More specifically this review was undertaken to:

- ➔ identify key themes emerging from the consultations that can be linked to the range of rights and general principles under the UNCRC and identify how children and young people's voices were heard on issues that were linked to their rights;
- ➔ help assess the implementation of the Convention in general through the analysis of the findings of consultations;
- ➔ highlight gaps in terms of the focus of the consultations vis-à-vis the range of rights of particular at-risk groups enshrined in the Convention.

Methods

This task required an analysis of recent consultation reports undertaken by DCYA/DCEDIY (see Appendix 2 for full list) to:

- (a) describe how the voice of the child was secured by each report, and
- (b) summarise the emergent themes relevant to the implementation of specific rights enshrined in the Convention.

For this review a structured approach was employed to summarise each consultation report⁵. Information on the focus of the consultation, profile of participants, consultation approach used, possible gaps etc. was entered on to a summary table. A second table provided more detailed information on specific rights and issues raised in each consultation report.

⁵ Four of the consultations were not included in the full tables as they were still in draft format or came to the attention of the authors after the first draft of the report.

SECTION TWO



**Overview of the
Consultation Reports**

This section presents an overview of the reports including the total number of consultations and participants; focus of the consultations; rationale; recruitment; partnership and co-design as well as methodologies and models used.

Number of reports and participants

Twenty consultation reports were reviewed. These were undertaken by DCYA in partnership with other state bodies between 2014 and 2021. These consultations engaged with 14,567 children and young people aged between 5 and 26 years. Most reports of the consultations provide details of the number who participated, gender and broad age range.

The focus of the consultations

The focus of the consultations related to children and young people's experiences and views on a range of issues including LGBTI+ issues (Doc #1), heritage and culture (Doc #2, Doc #3, Doc #6), experiences of adoption (Doc #4), experience of school (Doc #5), Internet and digital safety (Doc #7 and Doc #13), after-school (Doc #8), education for sustainable development (Doc #9), experience of Direct Provision (Doc #10), understanding of human rights for the Universal Periodic Review (Doc #11), healthy weight (Doc #12), the appointment of the Ombudsman for Children (Doc #14), youth justice services (Doc #15), reform of targeted youth services (Doc #16), experience of COVID-19 restrictions on mental health (Doc #17), experience of Guardian *ad Litem* Service (Doc #18) review of legislation of the Child Care Act 1991 (Doc #19) and the environment (Doc #20).

Within the consultations young people also raised other concerns such as homelessness in Ireland (Doc #6), and the need to address online hate crime, discrimination and racism which young people identified is mainly targeted at the LGBT community, religions, ethnic minority groups, people with mental health issues, women, members of the Travelling community and people with disabilities (Doc #7).

Rationale for the consultations

The consultations were undertaken for different reasons. Five were carried out to inform the development of national strategies - LGBTI+ Youth Strategy (Doc #1); Education for Sustainable Development (Doc #9); Obesity Strategy (Doc #12); Digital Strategy (Doc #13); and the Youth Justice Strategy (Doc #15). Four were conducted as part of a review of regulations or legislation - Adoption Hearings (Doc #4); Universal Periodic Review (Doc #11); Guardian *ad Litem* Service (Doc #18) and the Review of Child Care Act (Doc #19). Five were undertaken to gain insights on children and young people's views and experiences of particular issues where policy or service design was emerging (e.g., School experience; After-school; Cyberbullying; Heritage; and the Environment), and two were conducted to design a particular activity (both relating to Cruinniú na nÓg). Three consultations informed service or programme development - Direct Provision (Doc #10); Garda Youth Diversion Programme (Doc #15); and Youth Services (Doc #16). One consultation informed the procedures to appoint the Ombudsman for Children (Doc #14). Three of the consultations were undertaken during COVID-19 restrictions, one of which explored the impact of COVID-19 on young people's mental health (Doc #17).

Overall, this review of consultations undertaken by DCEDIY in the past 5 years, provides examples of how children and young people have been consulted to inform the decision-making process at a local or national level. The consultations have provided important platforms where children and young people have been facilitated and supported to voice their views and experiences. It is evident

that a huge amount of effort has gone into ensuring effective consultative processes including the planning; the recruitment of children and young people; and the use of child-friendly approaches to encourage participation.

Recruitment of participants

Most of the consultations were undertaken with a general population of young people. For such consultations, Comhairle na nÓg was used as the main access point for recruiting young people. Existing mechanisms within the Comhairle na nÓg operating requirements, ensured as wide a representation of young people as possible, including the inclusion of seldom-heard young people in the 'pool' of participants (see Appendix 3 for details of recruitment procedures used when consulting with members of Comhairle na nÓg).

For three of the consultations which included a cross-section of young people e.g., the Internet Safety Consultation (Doc #7), the Ombudsman Consultation (Doc #14) and the Youth Services Review (Doc #16), DCEDIY (known as DCYA at that time) worked with external agencies to secure the participation of groups of seldom-heard young people such as children and young people from care, young people with disabilities, and young people from the Traveller community. For recruitment to some consultations e.g., Harmful Internet Communication (Doc #7) and the Ombudsman consultation (Doc #14), the DCYA secured the support of voluntary organisations such as Barnardos, Exchange House Traveller Centre, the Irish Wheelchair Association and Empowering People in Care (EPIC).

Importantly, and relevant to this review, eight of the consultations were designed specifically to secure the voices of seldom-heard young people e.g., the LGBTI+ Strategy consultation (Doc #1), the Internet safety consultation (Doc #7); young people in Direct Provision (Doc #10), the Ombudsman Consultation (Doc #14); young people involved in Garda Youth Diversion Projects (Doc #15); Youth Work review (Doc #16); the Guardian *ad Litem* Service (Doc #18) and Young People in Care (Doc #19). It is of note that the consultation with children in Direct Provision (Doc #10) captured the views of children from refugee and asylum-seeking families and the consultation with young people on Youth Work (Doc #16) paid particular attention to securing the views of 13 groups of seldom-heard young people. This latter consultation included young people with life experiences related to substance misuse, mental health difficulties, homelessness, and young people not in education, employment or training.

Partnership and co-design

Most of the consultations were undertaken in partnership with other Government Departments e.g., Department of Education and Science (DES), Department of Justice and Equality (DJE), Irish Youth Justice Service (IYJS), Department of Health (DH) or state agencies such as the Law Reform Commission Ireland (LRCI), the Reception and Integration Agency (RIA), the Adoption Authority of Ireland (AAI) and the Environment Protection Agency (EPA). One of the recent consultations was planned and implemented with Spun-Out.ie a voluntary youth focused organisation.

Nine of the consultation methodologies were co-designed with children and young people e.g., LGBTI+ consultation (Doc # 1), Cruinniú na nÓg (Doc #3), Adoption Hearings (Doc #4), How was School Today (Doc #5), consultation with Youth Diversion participants (Doc #15), How's Your Head consultation (Doc #17), Guardian *ad Litem* consultation (Doc #18), review of the Child Care Act (Doc #19) and the EPA consultation (Doc #20). Six consultations involved children and young people in the dissemination of the consultation findings e.g., LGBTI+ consultation (Doc #1); Cruinniú na nÓg (Doc #3); How was School Today (Doc #5); Seen and Heard (Doc #6), Universal Periodic Review (Doc #11) and the appointment of the Ombudsman (Doc #14).

Approaches used to consult with children and young people

Nearly all (n=18) of the consultations employed highly participative child-friendly approaches to engaging young people, thus offering children and young people the space to express their opinions. Examples of approaches used included the use of lifeline exercises, brainstorming and open space/world café approaches. The consultations with larger numbers of young people used voting and prioritising exercises to identify the topics that young people considered to be the top issues from the discussions. Three of the included consultations were undertaken during the COVID-19 restrictions, two of these (Doc #19 and Doc #20) were convened remotely using Zoom and online tools to elicit young people's opinions, and one used an online survey to explore the views of 2173 young people on their mental health during the lockdown (Doc #18).

Lundy's Voice, Space, Audience and Influence

Lundy's model of participation outlined in the [National Strategy on Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-Making 2015-2020](#) and in the recent [National Framework for Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-making](#) identifies that four key elements are required to ensure effective rights-based participation – space, voice, audience and influence (see Figure 1 below). A brief comment on each of these elements is provided in relation to the consultations reviewed in this desk research.

Space – All twenty consultations were designed to provide safe and inclusive opportunities for children and young people to share their views on specific issues of interest. Consideration was given to recruiting participants from across Ireland as well as from a range of backgrounds and experiences, including those identified as seldom-heard. Some reports provided details of considerations involved in setting up the consultations such as the use of child-friendly venues, provision of travel expenses and refreshments, and use of skilled facilitators and other staff, all of whom would be vetted to work with children. A number of the consultations took place in the online environment, and specific tools were used to ensure these consultations provided appropriate space for young people to participate.

Voice – Child friendly participative approaches were used in all the consultations, providing children and young people the opportunity to voice their opinions on a range of topics and issues (**Article 12** Voice of the Child). Methods used included discussion in small groups as well as larger groups, debate, drawings, voting, and opportunities to add ideas throughout consultation events as well as surveys. Many of the consultations provided opportunities to give feedback in evaluations about the consultations themselves. Some of the consultations also provided examples of good practice in accessing the voices of very young children (aged 5 plus) using age-appropriate methodologies. The support and involvement of Youth Advisory Groups (YAGs) in the consultation design and dissemination of findings were further examples of opportunities provided for youth voice and expression.

Audience – With the involvement of DCYA in partnership with State Agencies, the voices and opinions of the young people involved in the consultations had access to decision makers. For example, the youth initiative *How was School Today* report (Doc #5) was launched by the Minister of Children and Youth Affairs and the Minister of Education and Skills. This consultation was a bottom-up initiative that originated from the deliberations of Dail na nÓg and Comhairle National Executive. In other projects, young people presented consultation findings to decision makers, for example, findings from the *Seen and Heard* consultation (Doc #6) were presented to Ministers and other key decision-makers at the Ireland 2016 Children's State Ceremonial event in Áras an Uachtaráin.

Influence – Findings from several consultations were translated into action or included in policy and strategic documents thus demonstrating the influence of the young people’s voice and opinions. For example, the Heritage Council consultations (Doc #2) informed the Council’s strategic plan, and the Cruinniú na nÓg consultation (Doc #3) fed into creative activities. At policy level, findings from the LGBTI+ consultation (Doc #1) informed the development of national strategy and subsequently its implementation plan. The original LGBTI+ Youth Advisory Group was replaced by a LGBTI+ Youth Forum, a permanent structure to support and advise on the implementation of the strategy⁶. This is an example of how the collective voice of young people identified important issues for policy, practice and society in general. The process adopted by the DCYA for this work provides an exemplar of how the four elements of Lundy’s model of participation can be adhered to in the development and implementation of a national strategy.

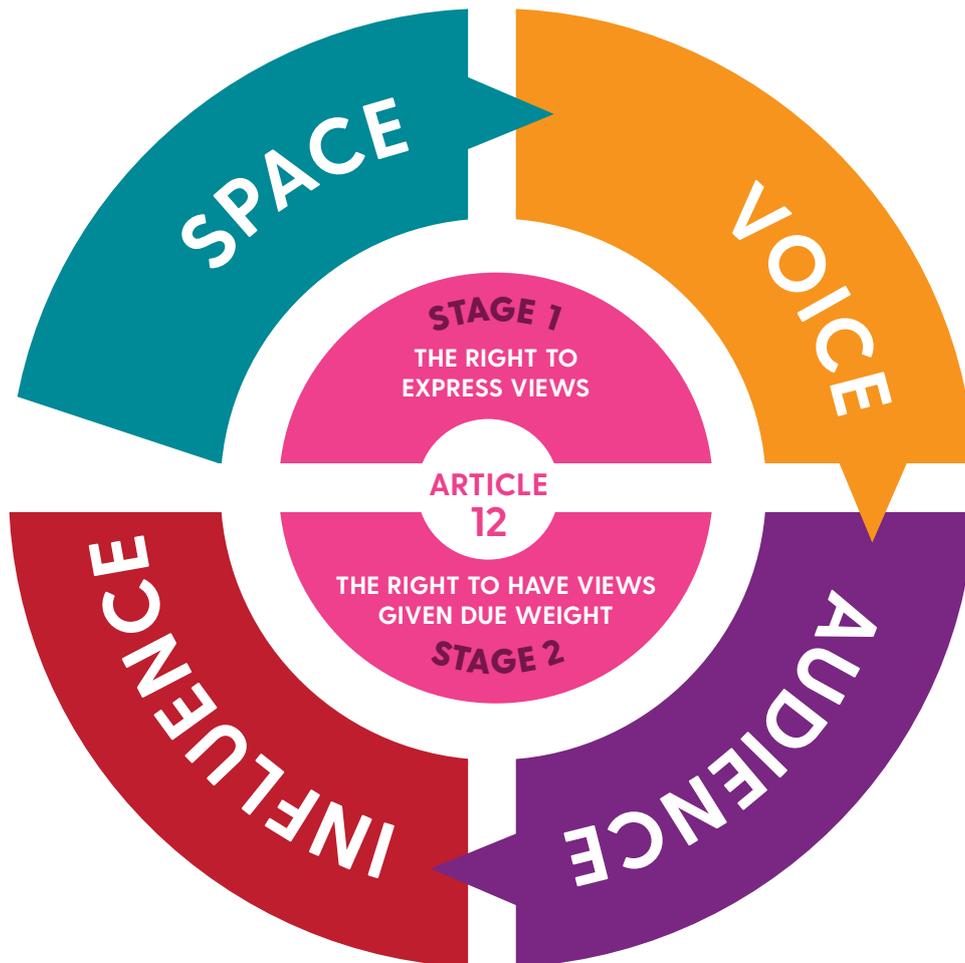
Two of the consultations (Doc #7 and Doc #13) directly informed legislation, and two of the more recent consultations (Doc #18 and Doc #19) will inform the forthcoming review of the Child Care Act.

⁶ <https://assets.gov.ie/24459/9355b474de34447cb9a55261542a39cf.pdf>

Figure 1: Lundy's Model of Participation

Lundy Model

This model provides a pathway to help conceptualise Article 12 of the UNCRC. It focuses on four distinct, albeit interrelated, elements. The four elements have a rational chronological order.



SECTION THREE



**Short summary of
each Consultation**

This section provides a summary of each of the consultations reviewed, incorporating information on the focus and format of consultation; the participants; the key findings; relevance to specific articles in the UNCRC; and follow-up.

Consultation #1

The LGBTI+ Youth Strategy: Report of the consultations with young people in Ireland (2018)

This consultation was undertaken by DCYA to inform the development of Ireland's [LGBTI National Youth Strategy 2018-2020](#) (the world's first National Youth LGBTI+ Strategy). A total of 3,882 young people aged 14-24 years from nearly every county in Ireland participated in this consultation which comprised of an online survey (n=3710) and workshops (n=172). Approximately seven out of ten survey respondents (69%) and nine out of ten workshop participants (93%) identified as LGBTI+. Three quarters of all participants (75%) were from urban locations. The consultation was co-designed by a specially convened Youth Advisory Group (YAG).

The young people who were consulted in the survey and during the in-person events recognised and welcomed many of the positive changes which had taken place in Ireland such as the changes in legislation (e.g., the Marriage Equality Act), reduced discrimination, more peer support and an increased freedom to express and celebrate identity. Nevertheless, half of those consulted reported experiencing ongoing discrimination and one in five had been bullied or harassed. The following suggestions were made by young people on how to improve the lives of LGBTI+ in Ireland:

- 1 'Normalisation' of LGBTI+ and removal of 'stigma' in society** through awareness raising, education and training. Need for more positive and inclusive representation in the media; improve awareness of LGBTI+ (particularly in the older generation) including clarity on gender, sexuality, non-binary issues and use of pronouns.
- 2 More welcoming, inclusive and exclusive social spaces for LGBTI+** within the wider community including rural areas; promote greater networking within the LGBTI+ community including between older and younger LGBTI+ generations; promote greater cooperation within LGBTI+ groups and youth and community-based groups; need for more gender-neutral toilets and changing rooms.
- 3 Ensure that education is inclusive – need for mandatory LGBTI+** training of staff, governors and pupils/students; gender theory and LGBTI+ history within the curriculum; gender inclusive sex education delivered by appropriately trained staff or external facilitators; tackle discrimination and bullying more effectively; provision of gender-neutral uniforms and bathrooms; remove religious patronage of educational establishments.
- 4 Strengthen policies, legislation and enforcement** to address issues such as discrimination, hate crime and bullying of LGBTI+ people in all walks of life including schools, workplaces, social spaces and sport; Need for inclusion of non-binary within the Gender Recognition Act; improved gender recognition for under 18s; Simplify process of

changing one's name, modify official forms to reflect different genders including non-binary; remove legal obstacles to adoption, fostering and surrogacy; introduce more protective legislation for LGBTI+ people, e.g., make religious organisations abide by Unfair Dismissals Act 1977–2015; need to separate Church and State in Ireland.

- 5 Ensure more comprehensive healthcare and social support for LGBTI+ people** including: awareness training for practitioners; improve access to mental health and addiction services including independent counselling in schools; remove requirement for parental consent to access services; improve sexual health education and provide access to appropriate services and products such as more accessible STI testing, pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP), dental dams, hormones and surgery; improve support services for young people not 'out' or who are coming 'out', including a 24/7 helpline and online support; sheltered accommodation for young people excluded from their family home; consideration for young people who may have additional needs including Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD); remove religious patronage of hospitals.

This consultation provided a platform for young people to express how they felt (**Article 12** and **Article 13**) about what needs to change to ensure society is inclusive of LGBTI+ community. Undertaken to inform the development and implementation of the national strategy, this consultation is relevant to **Article 4** and **Article 6**. The focus of much of the feedback was on need to improve education and information (**Article 13** and **Article 17**), proactively tackle discrimination (**Article 2**) as well as bullying, harassment and mistreatment (**Article 19**). Many concerns were expressed about inadequacies of health and welfare services (**Article 24**) as well as Education (**Articles 28** and **Article 29**) for children and young people who identify as LGBTI+ in Ireland. The consultation also highlighted the importance of safe spaces for young people to socialise which is relevant to **Article 15** and **Article 31**.

Two representatives of the YAG presented findings from the LGBTI+ consultation to a large stakeholder audience as part of the strategy development. This consultation directly informed the world's first [LGBTI National Youth Strategy 2018-2020](#). A follow-up report outlines implementation of the Strategy: [First Annual Report on the implementation of the Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender Intersex \(LGBTI+\) National Youth Strategy 2018-2020](#).

Consultation #2

Our Heritage, Your Say (2018)

This consultation was undertaken by DYCA and The Heritage Council (THC) to ascertain young people's understanding of heritage and how best to encourage and communicate with them about heritage. Twenty-eight young people (14 males and 14 females) aged 14-17 from across Ireland participated in a one-day consultation event, following recruitment via **Comhairle na nÓg**. The consultation format agreed between DCYA and THC received ethical approval from University College Cork who prepared the report.

Participants recognised and acknowledged the importance of heritage and many expressed immense pride, particularly in relation to language and culture as well as willingness to participate in efforts to promote Irish heritage. Young people would like to see a more child-friendly or youth-friendly focus at heritage locations and events. Schools were recognised as having an extremely important role in conveying knowledge about heritage. Young people recommended a stronger link between the school curriculum and engagement with heritage most particularly at Junior Cycle stage, during Transition Year and through Leadership Programmes. Regarding Irish language, young people made specific recommendations on need for more focus on Irish as a living language and less focus/pressure about learning Irish for exams. Concerns were expressed about native flora and fauna in relation to the environmental crisis and young people suggested more awareness raising and action, including saving the bees. Young people identified how the Heritage Council could reach a wider younger audience, including making experiences more interactive and making better use of technology. They would also like to see representation of their generation on the Board of THC.

The undertaking of this consultation reflects **Article 12** (Voice of the Child) and the appropriate methodologies which enabled young people to participate indicates consideration of **Article 13** (Freedom of Expression) of the UNCRC. The issues discussed and the feedback shared by young people related mainly to **Article 24** the Right to a clean safe environment; **Article 29** Cultural identity and **Article 31** Play, Leisure, Cultural activities.

This consultation provided opportunity for an evaluation and debriefing session with participants. Feedback was generally positive, however some young people felt that certain topics were difficult to engage with, gaps/negatives in heritage need to be considered and there could be improvements regarding location, venue, and the use of smaller groups for future consultations. Actions following this consultation included acknowledgment of young people's contribution in the subsequent [The Heritage Council Strategic Plan 2018-2022](#) "Attentive to the voices of young people who seek a sense of ownership of their cultural inheritance, we will also strive to provide more opportunities for youth participation and leadership." (p15)

Consultation #3

Report on consultation with children and young people on Cruinniú na nÓg (2018)

This consultation was undertaken by DCYA, Creative Ireland and Dublin City Council in preparation for Ireland's inaugural Cruinniú na nÓg (National Day of Creativity) established in 2018 to celebrate and encourage children and young people's participation in culture and creativity. Following a pilot with 5 children, a total of 34 children and young people from Dublin aged 8-12 (n=19) and 13-17 (n=16) participated in this consultation which explored what creative activities children like to do in school, at home and with friends. Participants were also asked for ideas for creative and fun events that children and young people might like to do in four specific spaces (Library, Park, Community Centre and Theatre) on the Cruinniú day.

Children said that in general they enjoyed physical activities, playing games, art, music, making things and going to fun places. They liked using technology, art, cooking/baking and dancing as well as playing outside and making up games with their friends. Their suggestions for child-friendly fun activities for the Cruinniú day in libraries included a 'kids room', a storytelling corner, access to computers, dressing up as characters from books as well as book-based games and activities. Ideas for park-based activities included food, amusements, waterslides, bouncy castles, trampolines, physical activities, music, talent shows, arts and crafts, games and face painting. Regarding community centres, children thought the following activities would go down well: a 'party room', entertainment, arts and crafts, physical activities, cooking/baking, food, music activities, carnival games and fancy-dress competitions. Children recommended that theatres should involve children in their events, including bringing them up on stage, having theatre tours, drama workshops, talent shows and food.

Young people described a wide range of creative activities that they enjoyed such as music and dancing, technology, literature, public speaking and acting, art and photography and video-making, cooking/baking, playing and making up games and telling jokes/funny stories with their friends. They also described being creative in school through subjects such as music, art, writing and participating in Transition Year programmes. Regarding the Cruinniú day, young people suggested that libraries could make use of book themes, offer a 'creative corner' with 3D printers etc., quiet spaces for reading, information stands, art activities, literary activities, book-based games, quizzes and fancy dress, 'meet the author' and workshops, e.g., mindfulness/yoga, philosophy and life skills workshops. Ideas for park events included food, music and dance activities, entertainment, art, physical activities, debating and discussion area, science experiments, book events/storytelling and an outdoor cinema. Ideas for creative events in community centres included information stands, food, funfair games, music and dance activities, magician, talent shows with young people as judges, graffiti wall, debating area and workshops including arts and crafts, beauty, face painting, coding, creative writing and photography. Young people suggested that events in theatres could include food, drama workshops, music, dance, art and baking activities, games, school plays competition, debating/discussion areas, fancy dress based on film/theatre themes, plays, films and discos.

This consultation actively sought out the opinions of children and young people (**Article 12** and **Article 13**) on types of creative activities (**Article 31**) to celebrate the inaugural Cruinniú na nÓg (National Day of Creativity). This event subsequently took place in June 2018 with over 500 events in cities, towns and villages across Ireland, and [has taken place since 2018](#) including invites to communities to get involved in the [planning and delivery of Creativity Day](#).

Consultation # 4

Report on consultation with children and young people on adoption regulations (2018) (unpublished)

This consultation was undertaken to inform the regulations under the Adoption (Amendment) Act 2017 and explored how children and young people would like to have their views heard during their adoption order hearings.

A Youth Advisory Group of 5 young people who were adopted was established to inform the design of the consultation. This group co-designed and piloted the methodology and observed the full day consultation. The formal consultations consisted of ten children and young people (5 males/5 females aged between 12 and 17 years) who were adopted or were going through the adoption process and all of these young people participated in the one-day consultation. Findings from the pilot sessions with the YAG were also included in the report.

The focus of the consultation was on the adoption order hearing and how this could be improved for children. Feedback from participants highlighted that the adoption order hearing was a very significant day in the lives of adopted children, marking the culmination of the adoption process. Most children and young people said they would have liked to speak for themselves at their adoption order hearing. They would like the hearings to be longer with more opportunity for both children and young people and their parents to speak about the adoption process. Children and young people would like to be asked more questions at their adoption order hearing. They would like to be able to select options of how to have their voices heard in these hearings such as pre-recorded video or audio recording, a letter or note, drawings, presentations or flashcards. They also acknowledged that it was important for children and young people to have the right to choose not to speak or to have someone speak on their behalf e.g., parents, guardians, siblings, grandparents, godparents, friends or social workers.

The key recommendation on how to improve adoption order hearings was to make them less intimidating and less formal, especially for younger children. A more child friendly process could include specially designed materials including books, games and colouring pages, an information video, an information letter, a child/youth friendly website and online resources. It was also suggested that a children and young people's advisory group should be set up to consult about adoption order hearings on an on-going basis.

It was noted that following an earlier consultation with children and young people in 2016, the Adoption Authority of Ireland had undertaken measures to help children and young people to fully participate and have their voice heard during their Adoption Order hearings. They had also redecorated the reception area and family rooms to make them more welcoming.

In recognition of the importance of listening to children (**Article 12** of the UNCRC), this consultation enabled children and young people to express their lived experience of the adoption process in Ireland (**Article 13**). The topic relates to **Article 7** and **Article 8**, and specifically related to **Article 21** which states that Governments must oversee the process of adoption to make sure it is safe, lawful and that it prioritises children's best interests.

Consultation #5

So, How Was School Today? Report of a survey on how young people are taught and how they learn (2017)

This consultation was initiated by Comhairle na nÓg after young people identified that teaching and learning was their priority concern. The National Executive of Comhairle na nÓg co-designed this survey with support from DCYA, Department of Education and Skills (DES) and a steering group of academics from University College Dublin. The survey was distributed via Comhairle na nÓg AGMs and 3,242 young people responded (55% female, 43% male and 2% other).

Three main themes were identified: **(1) Experiences of teaching and learning in school** - Most young people indicated a preference for active learning approaches (including project work, role plays, quizzes and debates as well as feedback from teachers), however only 1 in 3 students (30%) thought that their teachers made learning interesting and fun. Students identified that the teaching methods for mathematics, Irish and English need to be improved. **(2) Feelings about school** - Approximately 8 out of 10 young people (78% leaving cert students and 81% of junior cert students) said that they felt stressed by exams. First year pupils tended to be more positive about their school experiences, compared to older students. Most young people felt that they did not have a voice in school and that they would like to have more of a say. **(3) Views on services including IT in school** - Less than half of the young people were satisfied with the support services in their schools. First year pupils expressed higher satisfaction with levels of support compared to older students. Girls expressed more negative experiences of school compared to boys.

In relation to rights, this study provided young people with an opportunity to have a say in matters that directly affected them (**Article 12**) and enabled them to express their views (**Article 13**). The findings of this survey highlight that young people feel that they do not have a voice in how they are being educated and they would like to have more of a say in this on an ongoing basis (**Article 28** and **Article 29**). The authors of the study recommend that more research is needed to explore how teachers teach and how students learn in schools and classrooms in Ireland, and to examine variations in experiences relating to ethnicity, gender, and social class. A useful review of national and international literature on the student voice is also provided in this report.

Both Ministers for Children and Youth Affairs and Education and Skills, welcomed the findings of this consultation at the [launch of the report](#) and reinforced the importance of incorporating the experience and views of young people into the development of education by policy makers. The work was continued by the (2018-2019) Comhairle na nÓg and the National Executive's work on Student Voice and resulted in the development of [Our Voices Our School](#) initiative.

Consultation #6

Seen and Heard 1916-2016 (2016)

This consultation sought to identify children and young people's views about Ireland – what they liked, disliked and wanted to see changed in the future; as well as their views and suggestions on how best to remember the children who died in 1916. Two hundred and fifteen children and young people participated in this consultation which was arranged by DCYA, Ireland 2016 and Department Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (DAHG). Participants were recruited through selected primary schools, Comhairle na nÓg and a range of agencies that work with seldom-heard children.

With regard to their opinions on Ireland, children and young people expressed great pride in Irish culture, language, heritage and tradition; and Ireland was identified as a safe, free and democratic nation. However, children and young people also expressed concern and wanted to see change in issues such as discrimination; addiction and substance abuse; bullying; racism; pollution; crime; poverty and homelessness; the education system; obesity; mental illness and suicide. Many children and young people also expressed dislike of the stereotypical images of Irish people. Regarding how best to commemorate the children who died in 1916, the key suggestions included: a ceremony with speeches and presentations; re-enactments; visual representation; street festivals; plays and exhibitions. Some children and young people suggested a fixed monument; a park or playground; an annual holiday or event; the planting of trees; or the creation of a musical or drama.

While the stated focus of this consultation reflected **Article 12** (Voice of the Child), **Article 13** (Freedom of Expression) and **Article 31** (Play and Culture), children and young people also discussed issues pertaining to **Article 2** (Discrimination, inequality, racism, homophobia and xenophobia in Ireland); **Article 19** (Concerns expressed about child abuse in Ireland including a request to 'stop allowing parents to hit their children' and bullying (8-12 age group)); **Article 24** Concerns about mental health and suicide was raised by children and young people of all ages, with more specific concerns expressed by young people (13-18 age group) about need for better services for both physical and mental health. Concerns about levels of poverty and homelessness in Ireland (**Article 26** and **Article 27**); discontent about exam pressure; focus on Leaving Certificate points in the Education System; need to consider alternative forms of assessment (13-18 age group) need for better DARE opportunities (Disability Access Route to Education); need for improvements in the education system, e.g., sex education, extracurricular qualifications, the teaching of Irish and other languages, the influence of the Church in schools and rules about appearance and uniforms. There were also suggestions that young people should have more of a voice in school, and that religion should be separated from schools (**Article 28** and **Article 29**). Recognition and appreciation from young children that Ireland is a safe place; free from war; safe to go outside; able to play. It is perceived that 'Irish children have a lot of rights' and that Irish children can enjoy freedom and democracy, as well as neutrality (**Articles 35-40**).

Evaluations and exit interviews indicated a high level of satisfaction with this consultation. The young people presented the report to Ministers and other key decision-makers at the Ireland 2016 Children's State Ceremonial event in Áras an Uachtaráin. Additional actions to be undertaken included moving the National Play Day from its usual scheduling in summer to Easter Monday 2016; build a playground dedicated to the children who died in 1916; produce a child and youth-friendly version of the consultation report.



Harmful internet communications on behalf of the Law Reform Commission Report of consultations with young people concerning harmful internet communications including cyber bullying (2016) (Appendix B Youth Consultation)

This consultation was undertaken by DCYA in co-operation with the Law Reform Commission and involved 70 young people aged 13-17 years from across Ireland recruited through Comhairle na nÓg, Barnardos and the Irish Wheelchair Association. Participants explored the issue of harmful communications with particular focus on digital communication including cyberbullying.

Five key themes were identified by participants: **(1) Cat Fishing/fake profiles and accounts/hacking** were considered to have potential to seriously impact on people's reputation and mental health. Young people recommended that catfishing should be made illegal; that social networking sites need to take more responsibility for this issue, and that schools should educate young people about online safety. **(2) Cyberbullying/trolling/anonymous activity** – this activity was considered to include name calling, abuse, sharing of photos and personal information, online harassment and stalking. Young people identified that impacts of cyber bullying could be very serious, including suicide. They recommended that websites which facilitate anonymous activity should be banned and that schools should provide more information on this subject. **(3) Group chats** were identified as a key source of online bullying, illegal activity and sharing of harmful content. Participants said that schools could play a key role in educating young people about implications and legalities of sharing and receiving content through group chats; they also suggested that social networking platforms should make it easier to remove personal content. Participants thought that online platforms which facilitate group chats on harmful topics should be illegal and the posting of abusive messages and sending photos without consent should also be illegal. **(4) Online hate speech, discrimination and racism** were identified as being mainly targeted at the LGBT community, religions, ethnic minority groups, people with mental health issues, women, members of the Travelling community and people with disabilities. Overall, young people felt strongly that this activity should be illegal. **(5) Pornography/revenge porn/inappropriate use of photos** - Participants recommended need for more regulations and monitoring of pornography advertising online, particularly on websites used by children and young people; need to make revenge porn illegal due to serious impact on people's reputation and mental health; improve sex education in schools to include issues such as sending and receiving nude photos; and make it easier to report and remove inappropriate online content in general.

In relation to the UNCRC, this consultation enabled young people to voice and share their views **(Article 12 and Article 13)** on a topic which encompassed making laws to protect children's rights **(Article 4)**; protection and preservation of identity **(Article 8)**; protection of children from unlawful attacks that could harm their reputation **(Article 16)**; protecting children from materials that could harm them **(Article 17)**; protection of those at increased risk including children with disabilities **(Article 23)**; risks to mental health from online harassment activities **(Article 24)**; and education on keeping safe online **(Article 29)**.

This Report forms part of the Commission's Fourth Programme of Law Reform and the findings informed the drafting of the Harmful Communications and Digital Safety Bill, and legislation is now in place which reflects many of the recommendations made by young people.

Consultation #8

Report of consultations with children on after-school care (2017)

DCYA undertook this consultation to seek children's experiences and views of after-school care provision. One hundred and seventy-seven children participated comprising 81 children aged 5-7 years and 96 children aged 8-12 years in six locations across Ireland.

What do children aged 5-7-year-olds like to do after-school? Play was the main activity that young children said they like to do after school. This was prioritised as outdoor play, outings, and activities; followed by being with family members; Eating and Cooking; and Being able to relax. Children positively described going to stay with relatives after school as well as being at home and with friends; after-school locations were mentioned in relation to playing, and having pets was also mentioned. Having to do homework was the least liked after-school activity. Many children also expressed dislike of rules – in relation to after-school settings but also in the home. The third main dislike was 'other people' – this referred particularly to staff and children in after-school settings.

What do children aged 8-12-year-olds like to do after-school? Older children liked being able to relax in their own space at home; spending time with family/relations as well as being able to play with friends. Negative aspects of being at home for some children was being bored; not being able to play with friends and conflict with siblings. Positives about being in relatives houses or with childminders after school included relationships, able to play, nice food, feeling relaxed/safe and playing with pets. Negatives were boredom, lack of play opportunities, issues with rules and conflict with siblings, cousins or other children. Regarding after-school venues the positive aspects were opportunities for play, playing with friends and food. However, a large number of dislikes were associated with after-school venues in comparison to other settings, including food (lack of choice and rules about food); strict rules; limited equipment and activities, and in some cases, children said they disliked the way that staff treated them. Ideal after-school activities were identified as play, activities, food and eating, being at home, friends, time with family and relatives - children rarely mentioned after-school venues. While children expressed dislike for homework, most were resigned to having to do it as part of their after-school activities. When asked where they would like to be cared for after school, the majority of children identified home (59%), but others identified friend's houses (17%); relatives (13%); after-school club (6%); childminder (4%) and crèche (1%).

This consultation was undertaken as part of the State's consideration of after-school provision and reflects commitment to the Voice of the Child (**Article 12**) as well as use of age-appropriate methodologies including safeguarding procedures to obtain opinions from children as young as five (**Article 13**). The key message arising from this consultation is that the most children (89%) did not want to attend after-school facilities, they would much prefer to be at home or with friends or relatives at the end of their school day (**Article 12**). Children also clearly identified that play (particularly outdoor play) was the key activity that they wanted to do after school (**Article 31**) while having to do homework was mainly described in negative terms and was the least liked after-school activity (**Article 28** and **Article 29**). Some children made specific comments about disliking staff in some venues as well as over strict rules, restricted equipment and facilities etc. This concern relates to **Article 12** (listening and responding to the voice of the child) and reinforces the need to ensure quality after-school facilities. A number of the recommendations from this consultation were incorporated into the [Action Plan on School Age Childcare](#).

Consultation #9

Report on a Consultation with Children and Young People on Education for Sustainable Development (2016)

The DES and DCYA sought feedback from children and young people on their experience of learning about sustainable development in schools to inform the continued implementation of the [National Strategy on Education for Sustainable Development \(ESD\) in Ireland](#). A total of 72 participants (40 primary aged children and 32 post-primary students) took part in two separate consultative events.

The consultation explored what aspects of ESD is taught across the curriculum as well as within specific topics highlighted as being mainly Geography, Religion, History and Science at primary level and Religion, Geography, CSPE and SPHE at Post-Primary stage. While younger pupils were generally happy about the content and delivery of ESD, several post-primary students were critical of perceived limitations in the current curriculum particularly in relation to the environment and climate change.

Participants outlined the main issues and concepts covered by ESD in schools including: The Environment; Mental and Physical Health; Equality/Inequality; Climate Change; Pollution; Using Your Voice; The World Around Me; Kindness; Rights; Morality; Friendship and Love; Conflict and War; Politics and Political Systems as well as Societal Issues.

Pupils and students identified key recommendations on how to make the world a fairer and better place - these are grouped into three overarching themes with suggestions for topics to include in the ESD curriculum: **(1) Friends at home and abroad** – learn more about what is happening around the world such as laws, cultures and rights with topics such as exploitation of developing countries by first world countries **(2) Human rights** – more information on rights and practical information such as what to do about bullying; where to receive help for mental health, depression and self-harm; workshops on Sexual Education including LGBTQ+ **(3) The environment** – more explicit information needed on the environment and global warming and how to mitigate this. Focus needed on stewardship and protecting the planet.

Children and young people were supported to express their opinions (**Article 13**) and share their views (**Article 12**) on making the ESD curriculum more relevant including need for more information about rights (**Article 42**); access to information such as support for bullying, mental health and sexual health (**Article 17**) and more information on protecting the environment (**Article 29**).

Findings from this consultation were presented at the [National Forum on Education for Sustainable Development](#). Some of the suggestions from children and young people were incorporated into Recommendation 29 of the [Updated Interim Review of The National Strategy on Education for Sustainable Development in Ireland](#).

Consultation #10

Consultations with children in Direct Provision (2015)

This consultation was initiated by a representative from DCYA following their involvement in the Working Group initiated to report to Government on Improvements to the Protection Process, including Direct Provision and Supports to Asylum Seekers (June 2015). There had been 31 written submissions from children and young people to the Government Working Group, however there had not been any direct consultation with children. Subsequently, DCYA in co-operation with the Reception and Integration Agency (RIA) of the Department of Justice and Equality sought out the views of children and young people living in Direct Provision (DP) to find out what they liked, disliked and wanted to change about where they live. In total 110 children and young people participated in age specific workshops with almost 60% of participants aged 8-12 years and around 40% aged 13-17 years from 11 Direct Provision centres.

There were a few positive comments about Direct Provision including having somewhere to live, and access to facilities such as the playroom, computer and homework club. However, the dominant themes identified in the feedback from the children and young people were negative including: length of time families were forced to live in Direct Provision; lack of space and privacy for families; lack of access to play amenities for children, poor quality and inappropriateness of the food served; families not being able to freely prepare and cook their own food; inadequacy of the weekly allowance; and risk of sexual abuse of children in shared facilities. Several children and young people called for an end to the Direct Provision system.

Special protection should be granted to children who are refugees or seeking refugee status, and the State must provide them appropriate protection and assistance to enable them to enjoy all the rights of the Convention (**Article 22**). The State has an obligation to translate the rights of the Convention into reality for children (**Article 4**). By inviting children and young people to share their views of living in DP (**Article 12**), children had an opportunity to express themselves (**Article 13**). They described the on-going discrimination they experienced, including racism, and being stigmatised because of where they live by the wider community (**Article 2**). In relation to best interest of the child (**Article 3**), children said that there was very little that they liked about being in Direct Provision including living conditions, institutionalisation, and disrespect shown by staff towards them and their parents. Every child has the right to the best possible health (**Article 24**) and Governments must provide good quality health care, clean water, nutritious food, and a clean environment and education on health and well-being. Children and young people described poor quality and inappropriateness of the food served in the centres. Not being able to prepare one's own food, and restrictions on access to culture appropriate foods relates to **Article 30**.

Many children and young people had been in Direct Provision for years (with some having been born into DP), and they wanted their families to be able to move on and live normal lives. They described feeling unsafe when families are sharing space with single men. Children have the right to be protected from sexual abuse (**Article 34**). Facilitators undertaking this consultation had to enact child protection measures following details shared by children and young people during the consultation. Children and young people were very concerned about the level of financial assistance their parents receive, which impacts indirectly on them; they disliked the cramped, shared and often sub-standard DP accommodation (**Article 26** and **Article 27**). Some children and young people worried about their education as they often have no space or support for homework, and some also worry about limited third level opportunities (**Article 28** and **Article 29**). Children and young people say they often have nothing to do, when recreational facilities are inadequate or lacking entirely (**Article 31**). This also has implications for **Article 39** (recovery from trauma and reintegration) and children who have experienced neglect, abuse, exploitation, torture or who are victims of war should receive special support to help them recover their health, dignity, self-respect and social life.

The findings from this consultation were fed into the implementation of a Working Group report.

Consultation #11

Survey with children and young people for the UPR – Universal Periodic Review (2015)

This consultation was undertaken by the Department of Justice and Equality (DJE) in collaboration with DCYA in advance of the United Nations Universal Periodic Review (UPR) process in 2016. This was a two-stage consultation (1) One-page hard copy questionnaire with single question (2) Consultation meeting with children and young people to discuss findings of questionnaire in more detail and to produce materials.

A hard copy of the questionnaire with a single open question 'Which Human Rights are Most Important in Ireland?' was distributed through the Irish Primary Principals' Network (IPPN) and 31 Comhairle na nÓg throughout the country. A total of 3930 children and young people responded to the question. After the first 1000 responses were analysed, a level of saturation was reached whereby no new themes emerged. Thus, the responses to the question from the first 1000 responses were presented in the report.

Half (51.3%) of children identified Education/school, 45.9% identified shelter, food and water (40.3%), equality or not to be discriminated against (33.5%), freedom of speech (23.7%), safety, security and protection (17.2%), family, marriage and to have children (14.2%), to be born free and equal (14.1%), healthcare or good health (12.2%) and life (11.1%).

In this consultation the young people were supported to express their opinions (**Article 13**) and share their views (**Article 12**). The focus of this consultation was the on the importance of different rights and thus has relevance to **Article 42**.

The findings from the consultation informed the preparation of the State report under UPR process.



Consultation #12

Healthy Lifestyles Have Your Say: A Consultation with Children and Young People

This consultation was commissioned by the Department of Health and undertaken by DYCA to inform the 'Healthy Weight for Ireland' Policy (2015). A total of 82 children and young people participated in two events. The first event was with 48 primary school children aged 8-12 years and the second was with 34 young people aged 13-17 years from different Comhairle na nÓg. This consultation obtained ethical approval and included a strategy for addressing any sensitive issues that might arise from consulting on this topic with children and young people.

The main themes raised by children aged 8-12 years were recognition of the importance of eating more healthy foods and less junk food, getting enough sleep, participating in physical exercise and imaginative play. Smoking (including passive smoking) was identified as a potential threat to health. Children said that home and school the key places where they receive guidance about healthy lifestyles, including food choices and exercise.

Young people aged 13-17 years identified that body image and media influences were the main barriers to healthy lifestyle among their age group. Stress, self-harm and eating disorders were associated with pressure caused by body image. Participants emphasised need for greater openness on these issues and need to raise awareness within schools; it was recognised that young people could build confidence in themselves through membership of youth organisations, access to support groups and mental health services (like Mindspace or Jigsaw) and talking to a counsellor or friends and family. The concept of 'Nutrition Clinics' was suggested as a potential solution to encourage young people to have more healthy lifestyles. Notably while young people identified eating disorders such as bulimia and anorexia as a significant problem, the issue of obesity was rarely mentioned.

The importance of listening to children (**Article 12**) was evident from the beginning of this consultation where young people in the pilot advised facilitators not to use the word 'obesity' in the invite to the consultation as it might discourage young people from participating (**Article 13**). Participants in the consultation highlighted that media, including social media, could have a harmful influence on body image for children and young people. Children have a right to reliable information that does not do harm (**Article 17**). In relation to food choice and healthy eating, Governments must do all they can to ensure that children survive and develop to their full potential (**Article 6**). Children and Young People identified the importance of exercise and activities and highlighted how access to many facilities was dependent on location (**Article 31**). This consultation was used to inform [A Healthy Weight for Ireland: Obesity Policy and Action Plan 2016-2025](#) and was the basis of an article by the consultation report authors entitled [Including the voices of children and young people in health policy development: An Irish perspective](#).

Consultation #13

Report on the Consultation with Young People on the Digital Strategy for Schools (2014)

This consultation was undertaken by DCYA and DES and involved 32 primary school children (aged 8-13) and 43 post primary school young people (aged 14-18) from 34 Comhairle na nÓg.

The participants made the following key recommendations:

- 1 Technology needs to become more relevant to learning in school. Currently, technology is something that is more relevant to their social lives and is of limited relevance in school.
- 2 Provide access to learning resources on the internet as these are often more up to date than those provided in textbooks or easier to understand than what has been presented by the teacher.
- 3 Use ICT to open up new forms of learning and collaboration and provide greater flexibility for students with different styles of learning.
- 4 Provide Cloud-based services such as email, online resource banks, organisation of teaching and learning resources, and the administration of homework.
- 5 Use ICT to record students' work on an ongoing basis, accessing it at any time, and using ICT as their student journal.
- 6 Use ICT for administration including roll call in each class and the assignment of homework and homework feedback.
- 7 Provide ongoing training for teachers to help them use these services effectively.
- 8 Use ICT to help students with specific learning needs such as dyslexia or dyspraxia.
- 9 Raise awareness of technology downsides such as plagiarism, distraction, cyber bullying and access to inappropriate material and enable students to deal with these.
- 10 Help filter out unreliable or inappropriate sources and content.

This consultation enabled children and young people to have a voice and make a constructive input into the Digital Strategy for Schools (**Article 12** and **Article 13**) including specific considerations of children with additional needs (**Article 23**).

The views of children and young people expressed in this consultation contributed to the subsequent publication of the [Digital Strategy for Schools 2015-2020](#).

Consultation #14

A report on the involvement of children and young people in the recruitment of the Ombudsman for Children (2015)

This report provides an overview of the process of involving children and young people in the recruitment of the new Ombudsman for Children. The process was undertaken by DCYA and the Public Appointments Service (PAS) and involved a wide group of stakeholders including children and young people, their parents, the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, members of the interview panel and candidates for the post of Ombudsman for Children.

The recruitment process of children and young people specifically sought to include seldom-heard children and was undertaken with the support of the Irish Primary Principals Network, Comhairle na nÓg, Exchange House Traveller Centre, the Irish Wheelchair Association and Empowering People in Care (EPIC). In total, 80 children and young people participated in one of two workshop events: one for younger children (aged 7-12), and one for older children (aged 13-17).

At the workshops, children and young people helped to develop a person specification for the role of the Ombudsman for Children. Subsequently 13 children volunteered to participate in a Panel to help prepare the job description, design the advert, and design the interview. Two children from this group were then selected to participate in the Interview Panel.

The involvement of children and young people in this recruitment process was viewed positively by most of the key stakeholders involved in the process – apart from one interview candidate who questioned the rationale behind the concept. Children and young people provided some constructive feedback about the process including the need for shorter presentations and use of more child-friendly language. Furthermore, children and young people involved in the interviews, thought that these needed to be undertaken in a more informal manner and that children and young people involved in the interview panel should also have been involved in the final selection process.

The report identified that involvement in the consultation process had a positive impact on (a) the participants including increased self-confidence and esteem; (b) their families who felt proud of their children's involvement in the process and had noted their increased awareness of their rights as well as family themselves becoming more aware of role of the Ombudsman for Children; (c) the wider community as some participants were asked to give presentations at their schools and were regarded as role models for other children and young people.

This consultation reflects efforts being made in Ireland to consult with children on matters of importance to them and the subsequent feedback from children and young people could be incorporated into making recruitment processes more meaningful in the future (**Article 12**). From the feedback of those who attended the consultation, participated in the interview selection process, and sat on the interview panel to appoint the new Ombudsman for Children, this process has been a huge learning experience (**Article 29**).

Large-framed pictures depicting all the ideal qualities the children and young people identified during this process are now on display in the Office of the Ombudsman for Children.

Consultation #15

Report on Consultations with Young People Engaged in Garda Youth Diversion Projects (2018)

This report presents the findings from consultations with young people on Garda Youth Diversion Projects (GYDPs). The key objectives of the consultations were to explore young people's views and opinions on how:

- GYDPs assist them to move away from and/or prevent them from becoming involved in criminal and/or anti-social behaviour.
- How important it is to young people that projects are located close to where they live or if they would travel to other areas to participate in a project.

The consultation process was undertaken by Hub na nÓg, guided by an advisory group consisting of representatives from DCYA, the Irish Youth Justice System, and community based organisations. A Youth Advisory Group consisting of 6 young people who were current participants of the GYDPs was established to help advise on the consultation methodologies and process, and to pilot the consultation methodology.

Seven consultations were held in the DCYA's offices in Dublin. In total, 41 young people aged between 13 and 18 years (36 current participants and 5 past participants) took part in the consultations. The key methodologies for the consultations were: poster walls of ideas and individual lifelines based on the statement, '*The best things about your project.*', followed by a sticky wall exercise based on the questions, '*What works well in projects to help young people avoid being in trouble?*' and '*What does not work well in projects to help young people avoid being in trouble?*'. A jotter page session was used to identified common categories.

Participants described the best things about the GYDP projects to include the youth justice workers (YJWs), the trips and activities, the facilities, meeting new friends, courses and learning new skills, drop-ins, and positive youth friendly environment. The things that work well in the projects echoed the best things about the project, including having a youth justice worker who is non-judgmental, who listens, provides support and advice, as well as the activities and services available from the projects. Things that did not work well included project times (appointments too short, not regular enough, and not available outside office hours), YJWs who are not youth friendly, stigma and stereotyping, the location of the project (not local), lack of activities, the profile of participants (e.g., having a drug user in the group, having mixed ages in group), negative interactions with Gardaí, lack of courses/activities, and having to leave the GYDP at the age of 18.

The undertaking of this consultation reflects **Article 12 (Voice of the Child)** and the appropriate methodologies which enabled young people to participate indicates consideration of **Article 13 (Freedom of Expression)** of the UNCRC. Findings from the consultation have implications for **Article 40 (juvenile justice)** – a child accused or guilty of breaking the law must be treated with dignity and respect.

The findings of the consultation informed the development of the recently published [Youth Justice Strategy 2021-2027](#).

Consultation #16

A report of consultations with Young People on Youth Work as part of DCYA's Value for Money and Policy Review of Youth Programmes (Roe 2017) (unpublished)

The Value for Money and Policy Review (VFMPR) of Youth Programmes (2014) reviewed three targeted funding schemes, the Special Projects for Youth Scheme (SPY), the Young People's Facilities and Services Fund (YPFSF 1 and 2) and Local Drug Task Force Projects Scheme (LDTF). The schemes support the provision of youth services for young people at risk living in disadvantaged communities. In 2017, to inform the funding scheme priorities, the DCYA undertook a consultation with 264 young people on youth service provision in their locality. This consultation involved four approaches to engaging with young people. The first three consultations were consulted with a cross-section of young people in group settings (Consultation 1 was attended by 56 young people, Consultation 2 was attended by 54 young people, Consultation 3 was attended by 29 young people). All three consultations used participative approaches such as life-line activities, open space, world café approaches and voting to explore and prioritise young people's views of youth services, what they liked about their youth services, and what they would change about their youth service. The fourth consultation sought the voice of seldom-heard young people and as such was carried out using small group consultations or individual interviews. A total of 125 young people from the targeted groups across the country were consulted. The young people consulted were aged 10-26 years and reflected the following groups:

- Young People involved in a Youth Service in an Urban City;
- Young People Unattached to Youth Services;
- Rural Young People Unattached to Youth Services;
- Rural Young People with Mental Health and Substance Misuse Issues;
- Rural Hard to Reach Young People;
- Young people with issues related to substance misuse, anti-social behaviour, crime and homelessness;
- Young People in Care;
- Young People in a Garda Youth Diversion Project;
- Islamic Young People;
- Young People with Mental Health Issues;
- Young People Not in Education, Employment, or Training (NEETS);
- Young Carers;
- Young People with Disabilities.

The themes emerging from the group consultations included:



Some of the findings from the 13 individual consultations with the seldom-heard groups were synthesised within the overall findings but also presented separately to capture the messages from each group. From this detailed report one of the most relevant themes emerging for the consultation is **Equality and Voice**. Recommendations within this theme included: Making sure the voices of all young people from all backgrounds are listened to and heard, e.g. in a meaningful and non-tokenistic way; more youth participation structures and training in youth services; better integration of young people from different backgrounds or with specific issues in mainstream youth services, e.g. integrate young Travellers into mainstream youth services; more education on equality in youth services, e.g. racism, discrimination, sexism, ageism etc.; ensure youth services are inclusive to young people with disabilities, e.g. wheelchair accessible, cater for young people with learning difficulties. Young people from all the seldom-heard groups wanted to be more involved in youth participation.

Suggestions of ways to improve **equality and voice** included: raising awareness on equality and voice on social media, e.g., through videos; having LGBTI+ specific youth groups; provide supports for young people from immigrant backgrounds to integrate into youth services; provide training for young people in equality and voice through a national youth service; set up more Junior Boards of Management; have gender neutral toilets in youth services.

The targeted recruitment of seldom-heard young people and participative approach adopted ensured young people were supported to express their opinions (**Article 13**) and share their views (**Article 12**). The focus of this consultation, youth services and targeted youth service, and as such many of the themes covered had relevance to **Article 15** and **Article 31**. Recommendations to have greater involvement and youth participation of seldom-heard groups such as more involved youth participation has relevance for **Article 4** and **Article 42**. Suggestions to promote inclusion and reduce discrimination are relevant to **Article 23** (Children with Disability) and **Article 6** (life, survival and development).

The findings of the consultation informed the reform of the youth funding schemes and the development of a new integrated and targeted youth funding scheme [UBU - Your Place, Your Space](#).



How's Your Head – Young Voices during COVID-19 (2020)

This consultation was initiated by DCYA, in collaboration with the Department of Health and the youth sector (SpunOut.ie) to find out more about how young people in Ireland have been experiencing and coping with the COVID-19 pandemic. DCYA established a Youth Advisory Group to guide the consultation which was undertaken by SpunOut.ie. An online survey was devised which asked 4 specific questions and in total 2,173 young people aged 15-24 responded. The main issues raised by young people were:

Negative impact: (1) experiences ranged from feelings of cabin fever and boredom to more concerning scenarios such as isolation, loneliness, lack of motivation, overthinking, concern, worry, anxiety, depression and a sense of utter hopelessness; (2) young people missed their friends, relatives and social life; (3) Concerns about education particularly for older young people; (4) realities of lockdown - lack of routine, work and money problems, social distancing, not being able to access usual facilities including shops, sports etc; reduced access to support services e.g., mental health/addiction services; (5) negative effects of media consumption.

Positives to take forward: Some young people were using this time to engage in a healthier lifestyle, self-care and self-development. Many expressed a greater appreciation for quality family time, including time spent with family pets and being able to enjoy home comforts; a simpler slower life including no long commutes; improved finances; not having the pressures of school/college including avoiding bullies; benefits of increased use of technology included communication with those far away; and easier to do shopping. However almost 1 in 10 respondents were unable to name any positives.

The future: Over a third felt optimistic with proportionally more young men than women optimistic about the future. Over a quarter were anxious about the future, and one in five felt uncertain about the future. Young people who engaged with youth groups/clubs/services tended to be more optimistic and excited about their futures.

Healthy and happy in the future: young people thought it was important to have a network of supportive family and friends, and not to have to worry about work and money. They were aware of the need to undertake regular exercise and have a healthy diet; and felt their educational needs should be addressed. Other factors identified as important included: regaining a sense of normality; knowing that COVID-19 is being well managed; having affordable housing; progressive government policy; access to services and facilities; quality information, and a sense of community.

The Youth Advisory Group worked with the authors to identify ideas for action, providing a valuable guide on how decision makers can respond to the findings of the consultation. For example, they highlighted the need for an integrated response to ensure services (e.g., **mental health services, educational institutions, youth services, sports clubs, etc.**) work together to provide a co-ordinated response, thus ensuring that each service is aware of the challenges facing young people as they ease back into the next phase. It is anticipated that the findings could be used to help ensure that the needs of young people are considered (a) in society responses to COVID-19 (b) in the design and delivery of services and messages on living alongside COVID-19 (c) in the development of policies on issues relevant to young people.

In this consultation the young people were supported to express their opinions (**Article 13**) and share their views (**Article 12**). The focus of this consultation was on the importance of different rights and thus has relevance to **Article 42**. The findings of consultation have implications for the development of full potential (**Article 6**), social life and friendships (**Article 15** and **Article 31**), housing as well as education (**Article 28** and **Article 29**) and access to health services (**Article 24**).

The findings from this consultation were considered in the implementation of whole of society response to COVID-19 and informed the design and delivery of specific policies and services for young people (see for example, the Health Service Executive [BUBBLE](#) campaign). The findings also informed the design of youth service availability.

Consultation #18

Consultations with young people on the Guardian *ad Litem* Service (not yet published; publication expected in 2022)

A Guardian *ad Litem* (GAL) is a representative appointed by the court to convey the wishes and views of children and outline their best interests in child care proceedings. A GAL is appointed in accordance with section 26 of the Child Care Act 1991. In 2019, the DCYA undertook a consultation with children and young people who are, or who have been, involved in child care proceedings. The consultation, with 14 young people aged from 9-19 years (mix of males/female), sought their views and experiences of the GAL system, what works well and what needs to be improved.

During the consultations, the young people described the important role the GAL played in their care journey. This included acting as an effective representative for the child/young person and providing them with a voice in the proceedings (e.g., bringing up issues to get sorted, arranging for the young people to speak to the judge in his chambers, representing them in court) and informing them about proceedings. The ability of the GAL to provide both social and practical support was described as important.

In terms of aspects of the service that did not work well, poor communication and contact between the GAL and the child/young person was raised by several young people. Young people were concerned about how GALs listened to them or supported them have their voice heard. Some felt they had been misled or misrepresented by their GAL. For some young people having both a social worker and a GAL was viewed as unnecessary, when the social worker worked well with the young person. Some young people reported conflicts between the GAL and social worker.

Young people described why or why not they would like to speak in court. Examples of reasons for wanting to speak included: wanting to speak for self (come from myself not someone higher); it is their right; to be informed and know it is an accurate representation; to ask the judge his opinion; to speed up the process; because voice is missing; and it should be mandatory.

The reasons children offered for not wanting to speak in court included being too nervous or afraid; feeling intimidated by the setting, and perceiving court as somewhere for criminals. For some it was the fear of the consequences of their input on their relationships with family members. Others reported that their social worker or GAL did not want them to speak or they had not been offered the opportunity. Some felt their appearance in court wouldn't make a difference on the outcome.

Young people's experiences of the court system were mixed, two described positive experiences (opportunity to speak to the judge) but many described negative experiences. These included: feeling excluded; being told by GAL they could not speak in court; tension in the room with rude judge; speaking in front of birth parent/foster carers; and lack of confidence in process (e.g., wrote a letter to judge asking to speak to him but didn't hear back, etc.).

Suggestions for improvements to the GAL service included improved communication and accessibility, as well as ensuring the voice of the child/young person is heard throughout the proceedings. Young people also felt the role of the GAL needs to be properly explained to them. The findings of the consultation will provide an important source of information in relation to the future establishment of an Executive Office that will oversee the provision of GALs to children in care proceedings, including the development of operational guidelines and training.

The consultation methodology ensured the young people were supported to express their opinions (**Article 13**) and share their views (**Article 12**). The young people's views and recommendations to the GAL system are also relevant to Articles 12 and 13. Some of the issues raised during the consultation are relevant to other rights, e.g., the right to privacy (**Article 16**), and information about rights (**Article 42**).

Consultation #19

A report on consultations with young people in care to inform the review of Child Care Act (not yet published; publication expected in 2022)

In Autumn 2020, as part of the wider Review of the Child Care Act, the DCEDIY Child Care Legislation and Children's Rights Policy Unit (CCLCRPU) teamed with Hub with nÓg to undertake a consultation with young people in care. The aims of the consultation were to:

- ➔ gain an insight into how the 1991 Act works from the experience and understanding of children and young people;
- ➔ explore how major decisions are made during the child care and protection journey and how children's and young people's voices are heard in relation to those;
- ➔ identify what improvements can be made to the legislation to improve the child protection and care system and how major decisions are made along the care journey.

Participants were recruited via invitations to state, community, and voluntary organisations who engage with children in care and those who had experienced child protection and welfare interventions. A Youth Advisory Group (YAG) consisting of four young people who had experience of the care system was established to inform the consultation approach.

The methodology for the consultation, which was designed before the COVID-19 restrictions was developed by the Hub na nÓg team. The first meeting, a pilot session with the YAG, was a face-to-face event using activities similar to those used in previous DCYA consultations (e.g., lifelines tasks, brainstorming using post-its, grouping and voting). After this pilot, the methodology was modified to reflect the feedback of the group and was also adjusted for online delivery (due to COVID-19 restrictions).

The consultation involved four sessions: two with the YAG (one face-to-face; one online), and two sessions with two groups of volunteers. All three online consultations were facilitated by Hub na nÓg, and the Policy Unit was represented at the first two events⁷. A total of 13 young people aged between 15 and 23 years, all with experience of care took part in the sessions. In all three groups the following questions were explored:

- ➔ What are the important things for children and young people about the care journey?
- ➔ How would children like to have their voice heard?

The important things during the care journey included access to services and support, openness and transparency, and a sense of belonging.

⁷ As the last group had only three participants, the decision was made to keep an equal balance between adults and young people.

- ➔ **Access to support services** (e.g., mental health services, mediation, family support, helplines) emerged as a common theme across the three groups. Within this context, young people raised the need for early intervention to prevent the need for the child to go into care, relationship building between child and foster carer, support for the foster families, and improved access to social workers (e.g., outside office hours). Improved information about and signposting to available services was raised by two of the groups.
- ➔ **Openness, transparency, honesty, and better communication** in the process, including upfront information on why decisions had been made, why the child is in care, and what is happening. Related to that was the importance of listening to the voice of the child/young person.
- ➔ **A sense of belonging:** Children and young people had to negotiate a difficult territory in terms of their identity. Several placed a high importance on belonging and having their needs met in a holistic way. This included access to birth parents and siblings and reducing the barriers to the child fitting in and fully participating in school and social life.

During the discussions the young people made several recommendations to improve the quality of the care during the different stages of care.

In terms of **emergency care** situations, the young people recommended:

- ➔ Consider the setting from which the child is taken into care, and avoid taking the child into care from the school setting (which can add to the trauma and embarrassment);
- ➔ Have more social workers available in the Garda station to explain to children what is happening;
- ➔ To minimise the trauma for the child during emergency care proceedings, provide more training to An Garda Síochána on the sensitive management of the emergency care process.

Only three participants had experience of the **court system**. One spoke directly to the judge, another had someone speak on their behalf, and the third would have preferred to go through the courts and know more about what was happening. Suggestions for improvements included:

- ➔ Ensure the options are explained to child/young person on how their voice can be heard during the court proceedings;
- ➔ Ensure the child fully understands the implications of court ordered care;
- ➔ Journalist not naming child in the court report. If stories are being published, these should be run by Tusla in advance to ensure the protection of the child (this is especially important in small communities);
- ➔ Offer the option of a pre-recorded or written input from child to ensure voice is heard during the process.

All the young people had experience of **foster care**. These experiences were mixed, ranging from very positive ‘family-like’ care to some experiences of very minimal care. Even though some of the young people had formed strong bonds with their carers, there was little awareness of the foster carer’s right to apply for decision-making responsibilities after five years. Suggestions on how actions that might be taken to improve the quality-of-care that young people receive included:

- ➔ Provide training and guidance for foster carers on specific needs of child (e.g., health conditions);
- ➔ Match the background of child to background of family (e.g. same religion);
- ➔ More work on the relationship between the birth family, foster family and the social worker (to minimise the conflict between the three);
- ➔ More preparation work and opportunity for the child to bond with the foster carers via family outings, etc.;
- ➔ More flexibility for foster carers to make adjustments to care order decisions (e.g., increasing access to birth families to reflect the improving situation/relationships);
- ➔ Ensure the child is aware of the 28-day rule and this is adhered to within placements;
- ➔ Clarity (and flexibility) on who provides permissions for school trips/access to medical treatment, etc.;
- ➔ Put in place procedures to ensure the delivery of quality care (e.g., food, clothing, toiletries etc) by having systems to ensure that funding used to meet the child’s needs, thus reducing likelihood of encountering such negative experiences/conflicts in the home:
 - ➔ Clearer processes that minimise disruptions to the child/young person’s access to day-to-day activities and services;
 - ➔ Agree a workable system for payment of essential day to day items (school books, stationery, uniforms, etc.).
- ➔ Have a protocol in place where the young person can raise concerns/objections or provide clarifications or have their voice on their care.

The young people described different levels of involvement in the **Care Planning and Review** process. Some participants described active involvement in the care planning, other participants had been represented by others (e.g., foster carer/advocate) and some described haphazard involvement where they had been invited to part of a meeting. Suggestions for improvements to this process included:

- ➔ Minimise the numbers of adults/professionals attending the meeting;
- ➔ Have some level of confidentiality for the child (opportunity to have private input);
- ➔ Have fewer people in attendance (e.g., no foster carers, birth parent families);
- ➔ Create a child-friendly version of the care plan and meeting, and have child-friendly paperwork;
- ➔ Provide adequate notice of meetings and complete the necessary paperwork with the young person in advance of the meetings;
- ➔ Introduce effective feedback loops to keep young people informed of what decisions were made, why they were made, and what actions were taken.

Only the over 18 age-group had experience of the aftercare system. The suggestions for improvement for **aftercare** included:

- ➔ Aftercare support should be available to all young people leaving care not just those in education;
- ➔ Ensure young people are aware of their rights to an aftercare plan and what to do if (a) the plan is not in place and (b) if it is not followed;
- ➔ Social worker should introduce the aftercare plan earlier:
 - ➔ Planned preparation for the transition (with time to involve and prepare the young person);
- ➔ Young people should have their support needs (e.g., general life-skills, financial planning, education/training, housing etc) assessed on a regular basis and a plan devised to build the required skills:
 - ➔ Tusla to work in partnership with other agencies to help the young person build the independent living skills;
- ➔ Ensure the aftercare support offered by Tusla extends beyond providing financial support and the aftercare policy is implemented as planned:
 - ➔ provide workshops to teach young people the skills they will need for independent living (e.g., managing money);
 - ➔ have spot inspections to check how planning is progressing (inspections of social worker/aftercare worker);
 - ➔ introduce random checks of foster families to ensure they are providing young people with transferable life-skills (e.g., cooking, washing clothes etc.);
- ➔ More information on the services available to them in aftercare (e.g., MABs, Threshold, etc).

The Voice of the Child

The question on how the young people would like their voice to be heard was explored across the different stages of the care journey. However, the young people felt that every effort should be made to seek the views and opinions of the child, and to keep them informed of what decisions were being made, and why these had been made. They did not necessarily suggest that they should decide the outcome of care proceedings, but would have liked to input more regarding access issues (contact with parents and siblings), transfer of parental rights and similar matters. Suggestions on how the child voice might be expressed included:

- ➔ **Generally** – Acknowledging the best interests of the child and the age/developmental stage of the child, consider how the best to secure the views and opinions of the child at this stage of the process;
- ➔ **In court** – have victim impact statements that allow the child to write down or pre-record what it means to them;

- ➔ **In care planning and review meetings** – offer different options for their voice to be heard in the care plan/review meetings, for example:
- ➔ young person invited to attend all parts of the meeting (including adequate notice to prepare for meeting).
 - ➔ foster carer to represent them (after discussing the plan with them).
 - ➔ option of an independent person to represent the child (e.g., advocate/GAL, friend or another professional trusted by the child).

Other suggestions of ways to improve the quality of care during care included:

- ➔ Minimising the staff turnover to allow for the development of positive relationships between the social worker and the young person.
- ➔ Ensure there is a feedback loop throughout the care experience to ensure children and young people have their voices heard and they are informed on what decisions were made, and why they were made.

In this consultation, the establishment of a Youth Advisory Group, ensured the young people were supported to express their opinions (**Article 13**) and share their views (**Article 12**). As this consultation involved young people in the care system, it is relevant for **Articles 9, 19, 20, 24, 25, 27, and 39**. The consultation was undertaken to inform the review of the Child Care Act, and as such has relevance to **Article 4**. Some of the issues raised during the consultation are relevant to other rights, e.g., being able to socialise with friends (**Article 15 and 31**), the right to privacy (**Article 16**), and information about rights (**Article 42**).

The findings from this consultation will inform the review of the Child Care Act and the development of policy proposals. Recommendations for operational policy will be shared with relevant organisations such as Tusla.





A report on consultations with young people on the environment for the Environment Protection Agency (2021)

In November 2020, the [Environmental Protection Agency \(EPA\)](#), the State agency responsible for protecting and improving the environment as a valuable asset for the people of Ireland, partnered with the DCEDIY Participation Unit to undertake a consultation with young people to inform its future plans. The EPA sought to:

- ➔ raise awareness of the role of the EPA and environmental matters generally;
- ➔ hear young people's concerns and hopes in relation to the environment and their health (i.e., their hopes and concerns);
- ➔ seek input on ways to improve engagement and communications with young people.

The consultation approach was co-designed with a Youth Advisory Group (YAG) consisting of 9 young people from Comhairle na nÓg nationwide. As the consultations took place in November 2020 during the COVID-19 restriction, a virtual consultation using Zoom was required. As part of the co-design process, the Participation Team drafted an interactive youth friendly methodology which was piloted with the YAG, who provided feedback on the online process, and suggested ways of refining the activities.

Invitations were extended to all 31 Comhairle na Óg to take part in one of the two consultations. Local Comhairle Co-ordinators were asked to ensure a gender mix when selecting their participants and to ensure the inclusion of seldom-heard voices. Also, to secure the views of a more general population, specific emphasis was placed on recruiting young people who had not had opportunities to participate in recent national consultations about climate change.

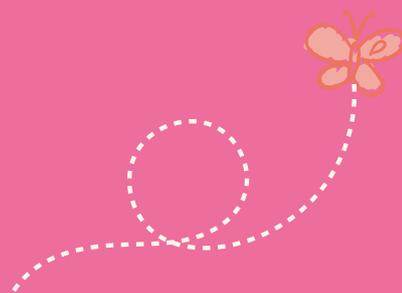
A total of 45 young people from 17 local Comhairlí, aged between 12 and 17 years, took part in the consultations (including the pilot). The consultation approach had four activities to explore young people's views on the environment including: an exercise to explore young people's values; exercises to explore young people concerns, hope, and fears about the environment; lifeline activity to gauge their personal participation on environmental issues; and world café activity to explore influences, information needs, and communication approaches. As the main consultation events were conducted remotely, Zoom was used as the main platform using software such as Group Maps and Padlet to encourage more active participation and allow for individual and group input. Young people's hopes for the future included: Government (Action), Sustainability, and individual actions to improve the environment together with related themes such as behaviour change (e.g., reduced waste, less use of plastics, etc); improved transport (e.g., increased use of bikes, improved public transport, etc.); and reduced pollution. Fears expressed by participants included: Government (inaction); the actions of large corporations and industry; lack of behaviour change; continued pollution; and use of plastics.

In this consultation the young people were supported to express their opinions (**Article 13**) and share their views (**Article 12**). The findings from the consultation are relevant to **Article 24** (health and health services).

This report will be used by the EPA to ensure that the voice of children and young people help to inform its next corporate strategy and communications plan which will have a particular focus on engaging and communicating with young people on environmental matters. [Members of the Youth Advisory Group presented the findings of this consultation to the EPA senior management](#) network.

The child should be fully prepared to live an individual life in society, and brought up in the spirit of the ideals proclaimed in the Charter of the United Nations, and in particular in the spirit of peace, dignity, tolerance, freedom, equality and solidarity.

Source: UNCRC Preamble



SECTION FOUR

**Summary of the
emerging themes
pertaining to the
implementation of
the rights of children**

This section presents an overview of the range and types of rights that featured in the consultations – these are categorised according to the broad themes of the UNCRC.

General principles

General principles include: the Right to life, survival and development; Right to non-discrimination; Right to express views freely; Right to have a child's best interests taken as a primary consideration in all matters affecting them

All of the consultations reviewed are examples of how the State sought to secure the views of the child (**Article 12**) and support them to share their thoughts freely (**Article 13**) as outlined in Policy documents such as 'Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures' and 'The National Strategy on Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-Making 2015-2020'.

The 20 consultations demonstrate how young people aged from 5-26 have been consulted on a wide range of topics and issues and have been offered space to express their views freely (**Article 13**).

The consultations include important examples of how the views of seldom-heard young people have been sought and acted upon. For example, the LGBTI+ consultation sought the voice of LGBTI+ young people to inform the development of the first ever National LGBTI+ Youth Strategy. This consultation brought to the fore the importance of creating a society which is free from discrimination.

The findings of four of the consultations draw attention to the need to address discrimination and to provide services that do not stigmatise or stereotype the young people who use them, for example the LGBTI+ Consultation (Doc #1), the Consultation in Direct Provision (Doc #10), the Garda Youth Diversion consultation (Doc #15) and the Youth Work consultation (Doc #16).

The consultation with children and young people on adoption regulations (Doc #4) and the consultations with children in care (Doc #18 and Doc #19) explored issues relevant to the best interests of the child.

Civil rights and freedoms

Civil rights and freedoms: Right to a name and nationality; Freedom of expression; Freedom of thought and association; Access to information; Right not to be tortured or ill-treated

The consultation with young people who had been adopted (Doc #4) and the two consultations which sought to gain the views of young people in care, (Doc #18 and Doc #19) provided participants with opportunities to express their opinion (**Article 13**). These consultations have messages relevant to **Article 8** (Right to Identity), **Article 16** (Right to Privacy) and **Article 20** (Children without families) and **Article 21** (Children who are adopted). For example, the recent consultation with young people in care to inform the review of the Child Care Act (Doc #19), raised issues relevant to the right of the individual to information (e.g., the reason for being taken into care, honesty about situation).

The LGBTI+ consultation (Doc #1) also identified the need for improved gender recognition for under 18s, and the need for the inclusion of non-binary within the Gender Recognition Act. The

recommendations included calls for simplified processes for changing one's name, and modified paperwork to reflect different gender identity. In the consultation with young people on the Education for Sustainable Development (Doc #9) suggestions for themes to include in the ESD curriculum highlighted the need for more information on what is happening around the world such as laws, cultures and rights and topics such as exploitation of developing countries by first world countries; more information on rights and practical information about how to deal with bullying and where to receive help for mental health, depression and self-harm; workshops on Sexual Education including LGBTQ+ which have implications for **Article 42**.

Violence against children

Violence against children: protection from violence, abuse and neglect; abolishing traditional practices prejudicial to the health of children; school discipline; protection from all forms of sexual exploitation; protection from inhuman or degrading treatment; recovery from trauma and reintegration

With a focus on young people's experiences of having a voice in the decision-making, the two consultations with young people who have experience of the care system (Doc #18 and Doc #19) include relevance to the protection from violence, abuse and neglect. Similarly, the consultation with children in Direct Provision (Doc #10) sought the views of young people who may be recovering from trauma (**Article 39**). This consultation also had important messages on the risk of sexual exploitation (**Article 34**).

The consultation on harmful internet communication (Doc #7) enabled young people to share their views (**Article 12** and **Article 13**) on a topic which involved making laws to protect children's rights (**Article 4**); the protection and preservation of identity (**Article 8**); protection of children from unlawful attacks that could harm their reputation (**Article 16**); protecting children from materials that could harm them (**Article 17**); protection of those at increased risk including children with disabilities (**Article 23**); risks to mental health from online harassment activities (**Article 24**); and education on keeping safe online (**Article 29**).

Family environment and alternative care

Family environment and alternative care: Right to live with and have contact with both parents; Right to be reunited with parents if separated from them; Right to appropriate alternative care where necessary

Three consultations involved children in the care system. Two consultations (Doc #18 and Doc #19) provided young people with opportunity to share their experience of the different stages of the care system, and to have a voice in decision-making in this regard.

Basic health and welfare

Basic health and welfare: Rights of disabled children; Right to health and health care; Right to social security; Right to child care services; Right to an adequate standard of living

Several of the consultations had important messages on health and welfare. For example, three consultations were directly focused on issues impacting on health and wellbeing e.g., LGBTI (Doc #1), Healthy Weight (Doc #12); Mental Health – How’s Your Head (Doc #17). Although not focused directly on health and welfare, a number of the other consultations had important messages about access to support services e.g., Youth Work Consultation (Doc #16); Child Care Act Consultation (Doc #19). The recent consultation with young people from the care system (Doc #18 and Doc #19) raised issues relevant to access to Child Care services.

The consultations to inform on harmful digital technologies (Doc #7) highlighted the need to protect those at increased risk including children with disabilities (**Article 23**). The consultation with children in Direct Provision (Doc #10) also had messages with relevance to the right to adequate standard of living (**Article 27**) and right to health (**Article 24**). The recent consultation with young people undertaken by the EPA (Doc #20) has implications for **Article 24** (Health – clean water and clean environment).

Education, leisure and cultural activities

Education, leisure and cultural activities: Right to education; Right to play; Right to leisure and to participate in cultural life and the arts

Seven of the consultations were focused directly on education, leisure, and culture and heritage and contained a number of important messages and recommendations – Our Heritage, Your Say (Doc #2), Cruinniú na nÓg (Doc #3), So How was school today? (Doc #5), Children Seen and Heard (Doc #6), Education for Sustainable Development (Doc #9), Digital Strategy (Doc #13), and Youth Work (Doc #16).

The consultation with children living in direct provision (Doc #10) highlighted a need for leisure and recreational facilities (**Article 31**), as well as the need to access culturally appropriate food (**Article 30**).

Special protection measures

Special protection measures: Rights of refugee children; Rights of children affected by armed conflicts; Rights of children in the juvenile justice system; Rights of children deprived of their liberty; Rights of children suffering exploitation

Whilst the consultation with children in Direct Provision (Doc #10) did not explore the history and circumstances of the participants, it is likely that some of the young people consulted may have fled persecution or may have been subjected to armed conflict. Young people in this consultation described feeling unsafe when sharing space with single men highlighting the importance of protecting this group of vulnerable young people from sexual abuse (**Article 34**).

One of the consultations sought the views of young people who were or had been involved in the youth justice system (Doc #15). A further consultation was planned with this group in 2020 but was postponed due to the COVID-19 restrictions, an additional consultation has also been undertaken with young people in detention⁸. The VFMPR consultation (Doc #17) also consulted with young people involved in youth justice services to secure their views on youth services.

⁸ At the time of writing this report was not available.

SECTION FIVE

**Messages for Future
Consultations**

This short section presents an overview of three observations arising from this review and associated suggestions for future consultations.

Demographic details

It was not always evident from the reports if and how the views of more seldom-heard young people were secured. It would be useful to have more details about participants. However, it may not be relevant for all consultations to provide this level of detail, particularly if the recruitment approach has sought a wide cross-section of young people (see Appendix 3).

Possible gaps

Taken together, the 20 consultations have secured the views of a large cross-section of children and young people on a wide range of topics and issues. As noted in Section 2, the views of seldom-heard young people have been secured on topic specific consultations. However, none of the consultations undertaken to date have focused **solely** on securing the views of four groups of seldom-heard young people:

- children and young people with disabilities (learning, sensory or physical);
- children and young people who have experienced homelessness;
- children and young people from minority ethnic groups and children from the Traveller Community;
- young carers.

Follow-up

It is clear that a huge effort has gone in to ensuring effective consultative processes including the planning, recruitment of children, and the use of child-friendly methods to encourage participation. It is evident that many of the consultations capture three of Lundy's principles: Space, Voice and Audience. However, it is less clear as to what happens to the children's and young people's views – the 'influence' as outlined by Lundy. In this review, we attempted to ascertain what happened after each consultation was completed and written up. For some consultations, it was apparent that the views and opinions of those consulted were taken on board in the delivery of subsequent activities/events or were incorporated into strategic documents or policies. However, this was not always the case. **For future reports it would be useful to include a section providing an indication of how the findings will be used, how young people will be informed on progress, and if possible, undertake to provide an update on the influence of the consultation. This would help to provide assurance on the value of children's and young people's participation in decision-making.**

The final word in relation to the importance of follow-up in the consultation process is provided by one of the authors of the consultation on children and young people living in Direct Provision:

"The methodologies used in this consultation process provided the children with space where they could share their views, a variety of media through which they could voice those views, an audience of decision-makers with whom their views would be shared, and it is now for those decision-makers to ensure that those views have influence in bringing about the changes that have been asked for by the children and young people themselves." (Doc #10 p32)



APPENDICES

APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Summary of the Articles in the UNCRC Rights of the Child

 <p>1 DEFINITION OF A CHILD</p>	 <p>2 NO DISCRIMINATION</p>	 <p>3 BEST INTERESTS OF THE CHILD</p>	 <p>4 MAKING RIGHTS REAL</p>	 <p>5 FAMILY GUIDANCE AS CHILDREN DEVELOP</p>	 <p>6 LIFE, SURVIVAL AND DEVELOPMENT</p>	 <p>7 NAME AND NATIONALITY</p>
 <p>8 IDENTITY</p>	 <p>9 KEEPING FAMILIES TOGETHER</p>	 <p>10 CONTACT WITH PARENTS ACROSS COUNTRIES</p>	 <p>11 PROTECTION FROM KIDNAPPING</p>	 <p>12 RESPECT FOR CHILDREN'S VIEWS</p>	 <p>13 SHARING THOUGHTS FREELY</p>	 <p>14 FREEDOM OF THOUGHT AND RELIGION</p>
 <p>15 SETTING UP OR JOINING GROUPS</p>	 <p>16 PROTECTION OF PRIVACY</p>	 <p>17 ACCESS TO INFORMATION</p>	 <p>18 RESPONSIBILITY OF PARENTS</p>	 <p>19 PROTECTION FROM VIOLENCE</p>	 <p>20 CHILDREN WITHOUT FAMILIES</p>	 <p>21 CHILDREN WHO ARE ADOPTED</p>
 <p>22 REFUGEE CHILDREN</p>	 <p>23 CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES</p>	 <p>24 HEALTH, WATER, FOOD, ENVIRONMENT</p>	 <p>25 REVIEW OF A CHILD'S PLACEMENT</p>	 <p>26 SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC HELP</p>	 <p>27 FOOD, CLOTHING, A SAFE HOME</p>	 <p>28 ACCESS TO EDUCATION</p>
 <p>29 AIMS OF EDUCATION</p>	 <p>30 MINORITY CULTURE, LANGUAGE AND RELIGION</p>	 <p>31 REST, PLAY, CULTURE, ARTS</p>	 <p>32 PROTECTION FROM HARMFUL WORK</p>	 <p>33 PROTECTION FROM HARMFUL DRUGS</p>	 <p>34 PROTECTION FROM SEXUAL ABUSE</p>	 <p>35 PREVENTION OF SALE AND TRAFFICKING</p>
 <p>36 PROTECTION FROM EXPLOITATION</p>	 <p>37 CHILDREN IN DETENTION</p>	 <p>38 PROTECTION IN WAR</p>	 <p>39 RECOVERY AND REINTEGRATION</p>	 <p>40 CHILDREN WHO BREAK THE LAW</p>	 <p>41 BEST LAW FOR CHILDREN APPLIES</p>	 <p>42 EVERYONE MUST KNOW CHILDREN'S RIGHTS</p>
<p>43-54</p>  <p>HOW THE CONVENTION WORKS</p>	<h1>CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD</h1>					

Source: UNICEF 2017 [Summary of the UNCRC](#)

Appendix 2: Reports included in the review

- 1 [LGBTI+ National Youth Strategy 2018-2020: Consultations Report](#)
- 2 [Our Heritage, Your Say: Report on the Consultation with Young People on the Future of Heritage in Ireland \(2018\)](#)
- 3 [Report on consultations with children and young people on Cruinniú na nÓg \(2018\)](#)
- 4 Report on consultation with children and young people on adoption regulations (2018) (not available online)
- 5 [So, How Was School Today? Report of a survey on how young people are taught and how they learn \(2017\)](#)
- 6 [Children Seen and Heard 1916-2016 \(2016\)](#)
- 7 [Harmful internet communications on behalf of the Law Reform Commission](#)
- 8 [Report of Consultations with Children on After-school Care \(2017\)](#)
- 9 [Report on a Consultation with Children and Young People on Education for Sustainable Development \(2016\)](#)
- 10 [Report of DCYA consultations with children and young people living in Direct Provision \(2015\)](#)
- 11 Survey with children and young people for the UPR – Universal Periodic Review (2015) (not available online)
- 12 Consultations to inform the ‘Healthy Weight for Ireland’ Policy (2015) (not available online)
- 13 [Consultations on the Digital Strategy for Schools \(2014\)](#)
- 14 Consultations with, and involvement of, children in the appointment of the Ombudsman for Children (2014) (not available online)
- 15 [Report on Consultations with Young People Engaged in Garda Youth Division Projects](#) (Sandra Roe 2019 Report)
- 16 A report of consultations with Young People on Youth Work as part of DCYA’s Value for Money and Policy Review of Youth Programmes (Roe 2017) (unpublished) (not available online)
- 17 [How’s Your Head – Young Voices during Covid-19 \(2020\)](#)
- 18 Consultations with young people on the Guardian *ad Litem* Service (2019) (not yet published; publication expected in 2022)
- 19 A report on consultations with young people in care to inform the review of Child Care Act (not yet published; publication expected in 2022)
- 20 [Report on the Environmental Protection Agency’s Consultation with Young People \(2021\)](#)

Appendix 3: Recruitment for consultations conducted under the umbrella of the Participation Unit of the DCEDIY

Recruitment for consultations on issues that affect the general population

Mechanisms to include seldom-heard children and young people are a core component of the recruitment process for all consultations. Invitations issued to Comhairle na nÓg, schools and other organisations systematically include a request to ensure diversity in the children and young people selected to participate.

If the main target group for a consultation is the 31 Comhairle na nÓg, considerable efforts are made to ensure a mix of young people with respect to age, geographic, demographic, gender, ability, socioeconomic, ethnic, religious, cultural and other relevant factors. It should be noted that the criteria for funding for Comhairle na nÓg include a requirement to adopt mechanisms to include seldom-heard young people in the Comhairle.

If the main target group for consultations is primary schools, the approach to recruitment is to ensure that the schools invited to participate include DEIS schools, schools with a high enrolment of students from different nationalities and religions and schools that provide support to children with learning and other educational needs.

Children and young people's application and registration information

It has been the policy of the Participation Unit since its inception in 2003 that children and young people are not asked to declare demographic, gender, ability, socioeconomic, ethnic, religious or cultural identity or membership of a specific group, on application forms or at registration. This is a conscious policy developed out of a respect for the right of every child and young person to be an individual, to have agency and not to be defined by socioeconomic, ability, ethnic or other factors. The starting point for participative initiatives is that participants share the common experience of being children and young people.

Self-identification during consultations

If a child or young person wishes to identify as having a disability, being in care, being LGBTI+, being a member of an ethnic minority or another factor, this is supported and encouraged by facilitators. The preparation and briefing of facilitators routinely includes guidance on facilitating children and young people to identify issues that matter to them in a safe, supported and appropriate way.

Limitations of the approach versus the benefits

The limitations of the approach adopted by the DCEDIY are acknowledged, particularly in the context of not being able to provide hard evidence of the inclusion of seldom-heard children and young people in participative and consultative initiatives. However, it is the view of the team that the right of children and young people to individuality and agency outweighs the limitations of the lack of demographic data on their status or identification.

Identification of the status of children and young people at consultations on issues that affect specific cohorts

Recruitment for consultations with specific groups of seldom-heard children and young people, such as those in care, those that have been adopted, those that are in the juvenile justice system and others are conducted in an entirely different way to consultations on issues that affect the general population. For these consultations, recruitment is conducted via organisations that provide services to, or work with children and young people who experience or have experienced the issues that are the subject matter of the consultations. Thus, it is possible to provide data on the status of child and youth participants.

WHAT WE THINK

A review of past consultations with children and young people as part of the UNCRC reporting process

Notes

Notes

