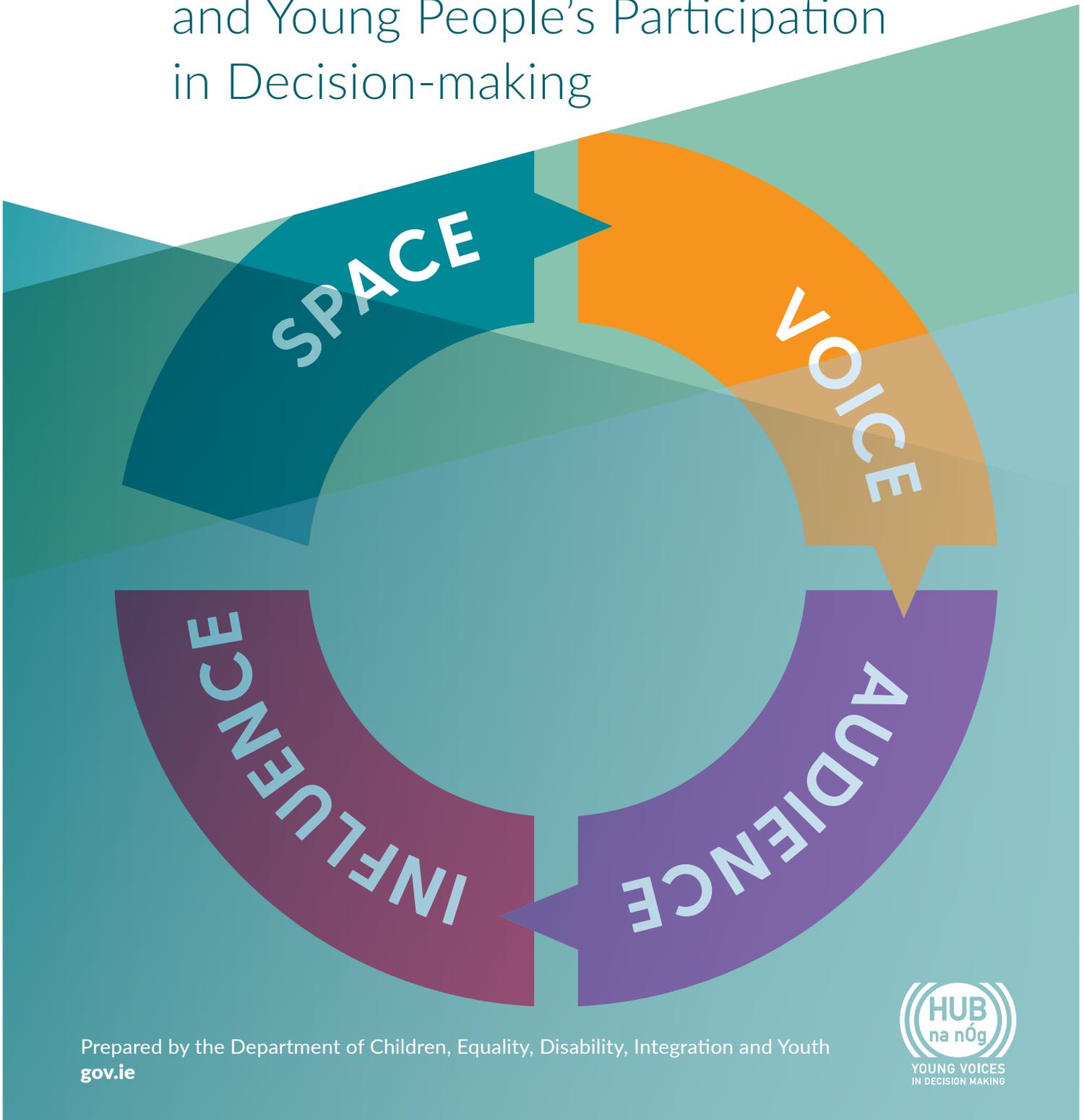




# Participation Framework

National Framework for Children  
and Young People's Participation  
in Decision-making



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## Minister's Foreword

I welcome publication of this *National Framework for Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-Making*. The Framework is underpinned by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Since the publication of the *National Strategy for Children and Youth People's Participation in Decision-Making 2015-2020*, Ireland has led the way in ensuring that children and young people are at the heart of government decision making.

This Participation Framework will further support and enhance that work by providing practical tools to ensure that children and young people are included in decision-making in all settings where decisions made by adults will impact their lives.

In 2017, my Department established Hub na nÓg as a centre of excellence on giving children and young people a voice in decision-making. Hub na nÓg and Professor Laura Lundy, from the Children's Rights Centre in Queens University Belfast, collaborated with a wide range of stakeholders in the development of this Participation Framework. Policy makers at national and local level, teachers from early years to post-primary, gardaí, social workers, healthcare workers, arts professionals and others, gave their time and expertise to inform the development of planning and evaluation checklists for use in policy making, programme planning and decision-making in everyday settings.

My Department will support implementation of the Participation Framework through capacity building measures and training provided by Hub na nÓg, to support practitioners and policy makers working across all settings relevant to children and young people's lives.

I believe this Framework will play an important long term role in ensuring that Ireland is a country where all children and young people are respected, listened to and where their views are taken on board routinely in the public services offered to them, as citizens of today and not merely as the adults of tomorrow.

**Roderic O'Gorman**

*Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth*

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## Introduction

The Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Inclusion and Youth (DCEDIY) National Framework for Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-making (the Framework) aims at support departments, agencies and organisations in a journey towards improving their practice in listening to children and young people and giving them a voice in decision-making. The Framework is underpinned by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)<sup>1</sup>, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)<sup>2</sup> and the National Strategy on Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-making (the National Participation Strategy)<sup>3</sup> and was developed in collaboration with Professor Laura Lundy of Queen's University, Belfast. The priority for the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA) in the National Participation Strategy was the establishment of Hub na nÓg to support and enable the implementation of the Strategy and build capacity in relation to children and young people's participation in decision-making.

In tandem with the National Participation Strategy, the Framework is primarily aimed at children and young people under the age of 18, but "also embraces the voice of young people in the transition to adulthood up to the age of 24."<sup>4</sup> The implementation of the Framework by departments, agencies and organisations must be informed and supported by an effective child safeguarding statement and processes.

## Context for the development of the Framework by Hub na nÓg

The Framework is a means of enabling the implementation of the National Participation Strategy across sectors and professional groups with a shared understanding and approach. The Framework is also a response to requests from stakeholders for guidance on meeting their obligations under the CRC, the CRPD and domestic policy and legislative provisions on children and young people's right to a voice. Through its engagement with statutory and non-statutory organisations, Hub na nÓg has identified the need for training, support and guidance on a rights-based approach to listening to children and young people and involving them in decisions that affect their lives. The growing number of requests to the DCEDIY and Hub na nÓg for support and guidance on consulting with children and young people and training on how to involve them in decision-making is testament to both the positive impact of the National Participation Strategy and the practice and cultural challenges that continue to exist on this issue. These requests also highlighted the need for an Implementation Framework.

## A collaborative process of development

From the outset, collaboration with a wide range of stakeholders was at the heart of the development of the Framework. This collaboration included strategic meetings with government departments, state agencies, young people and non-government organisations. Stakeholders provided written feedback on the Framework document, user-tested the draft planning checklist and feedback form and proposed good practice examples for inclusion in the Framework.

In order to ensure that the Framework's Everyday Spaces Checklist meets the needs of practitioners, Hub na nÓg conducted focus groups with early learning and care and school aged childcare practitioners, primary school teachers, secondary school teachers, social workers and family support workers, youth workers, paediatric nurses and Garda Juvenile Liaison Officers. Focus group participants provided invaluable feedback and suggestions that led to a greatly improved final Everyday Spaces Checklist. This will help practitioners give children and young people a voice in decision-making in the majority of everyday situations and activities.

Overall, the feedback has significantly and positively shaped the final Framework, including checklists, feedback forms and good practice examples.

## Focus of the Framework

The Framework focuses on children and young people's individual and collective participation in decision-making, whether that takes place in person, online or both. Individual decisions are those that affect one child, such as decisions about the health, education or social care that they receive. Collective decisions are those that affect children as a group in everyday settings like schools, early learning and care services, youth clubs and projects, and creative, artistic and sporting activities, or in the development of national and organisational projects, programmes, services, research, legislation and policies.

Concerning their collective participation in decision-making, the Framework's vision and guidance includes both adult-led engagement of children and young people and child and youth-led participatory initiatives in face-to-face and online settings.

The Framework aims at achieving the overarching objectives of the National Participation Strategy. This includes:

- improving and establishing mechanisms to ensure that seldom-heard and vulnerable children and young people are listened to and involved in decision-making; and
- mainstreaming the participation of children and young people in the development of policy, legislation, services and research.

Meaningful and sustained participation by children and young people in decision-making requires strong organisational commitment, and the implementation of the Framework is supported by four enabling factors:

- Organisational buy-in
- Training and capacity building for decision-makers
- Resources (financial, human, time)
- Monitoring and feedback.

Further information on these enabling factors is outlined on page 24.

## Framework structure

The Framework is comprised of:

- A Framework rationale
- A Framework vision
- Overarching principles
- Guidance on prioritising children and young people's perspectives
- A participation model
- Planning and evaluation checklists and feedback forms
- A set of enabling factors
- Good practice examples.

## 1. Framework Rationale: Why Involve Children and Young People in Decision-making?

Statutory and non-statutory organisations are obliged to seek children's views and take them seriously under the CRC, the CRPD, specific domestic legislative provisions (see Appendix 1) and the National Participation Strategy. In addition to being a human right, the involvement of children and young people in decision-making ensures the development of more effective policies, services, programmes, facilities, learning approaches, clubs, cultural and sporting activities, and other initiatives.

The CRC and CRPD are legally binding international agreements setting out an integrated framework of overlapping rights and obligations. The rights belong to children and young people, and the obligations to State parties. These obligations apply to all Government and State agencies, State-funded organisations and other sectors that work with children and young people. The rights include, but are not limited to, children having a voice in their local communities, in early education, in schools and non-formal education, in health and social services and in the courts and legal system. This places a considerable duty on organisations and individuals who work directly with children or young people or have responsibility for policies, services, research or legislation that affect them. The United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child notes that statutory bodies must implement children's rights and ensure that non-statutory service providers respect and implement children's rights in accordance with CRC obligations.<sup>5</sup>

Article 12 of the CRC states: "State Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child."

CRC General Comment 12 gives direction to State parties on how to implement Article 12.<sup>6</sup> It notes that the right to be heard is one of the four general principles of the CRC and is a fundamental value that should be considered in the interpretation and implementation of all other rights. It goes on to state: "Article 12 stipulates that simply listening to the child is insufficient; the views of the child have to be seriously considered when the child is capable of forming her or his own views."<sup>7</sup> This General Comment further notes that the child does not need comprehensive knowledge of the matter affecting him or her, but sufficient understanding to be capable of appropriately forming a view.

Specific rights for children with disabilities to be heard are set out in the CRPD. Article 7(3) of the CRPD requires children with disabilities to be provided with disability and age-appropriate assistance when expressing their views and, like Article 12, states that their views must be given due weight. CRPD General Comment 7 emphasises that State parties should support the decision-making of children with disabilities by, among other things, equipping them with, and enabling them to use, any mode of communication necessary to facilitate the expression of their views.<sup>8</sup>

There is a significant evidence base highlighting the value of involving children and young people in decision-making. The development of the National Participation Strategy was informed by a policy and literature review<sup>9</sup> that was commissioned to analyse the implementation of Goal 1 (voice of the child) of *Our Children – Their Lives: National Children's Strategy, 2000-2010*.<sup>10</sup> The review noted the growing body of national and international evidence on the benefits of participation by children and young people in decision-making. As well as general improvements for children and young people and for wider society, the positive effects are also evident in services, policies, research, and active citizenship.

The review recommended that the DCYA establish a Participation Hub as a centre of excellence to support the implementation of the Participation Strategy, with a particular focus on children and young people who are seldom heard. **Hub na nÓg: Young Voices in Decision-making** was established by the DCYA in 2017. The publication of the Framework under the auspices of Hub na nÓg represents a significant contribution to building capacity and shared understanding among all those working to improve outcomes for children and young people and to realise their right to have a voice in decisions that affect their lives.

## 2. Framework Vision: Participation with Purpose

The vision of the Framework is participation with purpose. Participation with purpose is about two distinct but interrelated factors, the purpose or objective of your organisation and the purpose or objective of involving children and young people in decision-making. It is important not to get stuck in the process of 'doing' participation, but to ensure that the purpose of involving children and young people in decision-making is to give them a voice on day-to-day activities and practices, or on the development of projects, programmes, services or policies that are central to the objectives and role of your organisation. At the heart of participation with purpose is ensuring that when children and young people are involved in decision-making, their views are listened to, taken seriously and given due weight, with the intention that these views will influence the outcome or initiate change.

The Planning Checklist on page 18 and Everyday Spaces Checklist on page 20 provide guidance on how to involve children and young people at all the different levels of an activity and at all the stages of decision-making in both face-to-face and online settings.

Implementing participation with purpose requires a clear rationale on:

- what participation is and what it is not;
- how to involve children and young people in decision-making;
- how to ensure the involvement of seldom-heard children and young people in decision-making;
- how to follow up and give feedback to children and young people; and
- how to be realistic with them.

### What participation is and what it is not

#### What it is

Children and young people's participation in decision-making is defined as: "ongoing processes, which include information-sharing and dialogue between children and adults based on mutual respect, and in which children can learn how their views and those of adults are taken into account and shape the outcome of such processes."<sup>11</sup> In practice, this means that children and young people should be involved in decision-making in everyday spaces and situations such as early learning and care settings, classrooms, hospitals and clubs as well as in strategic developments, such as policies, programmes, services, legislation and research.

Facilitating children's participation in decision-making acknowledges their status as rights-holders and confirms that they are 'citizens of today' rather than 'beings in becoming'.<sup>12</sup> In its General Comment on Early Childhood, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child notes that children have an evolving capacity to participate in decisions that affect them as they grow and mature, and that adults have a key role in enabling and facilitating them in making their voices heard.<sup>13</sup>

Children and young people have expertise in their own lives, but they are not the only ones. Adults also have considerable expertise in the lives of children and young people, but do not always know how children feel, what they think or what they like. Accordingly, it is important for adult decision-makers to listen to children and young people and give due weight to their views.

## What it is not

There are a number of misconceptions about children and young people's participation, some of which may serve to restrict their involvement in decision-making.

To clarify, children and young people's participation in decision-making is not:

- Handing over power to children and young people. It is about adults making decisions in ways that involve children and young people as fully as possible.
- Believing that children and young people are the only experts on their own lives – adults also have expertise in children and young people's lives and it is this combined expertise that will enable better decisions to be made.
- Allowing children and young people to do things that are harmful or unsafe or that violate their other rights. Children and young people's right to have their views given due weight may need to be balanced with their right to be protected from harm. In all cases, they are entitled to have decisions made in which their best interests are a primary consideration. Any decision about their best interests should consider the impact on their rights (including their right to have their views given due weight) and should take children and young people's views into account.

Giving due weight to children and young people's views does not necessarily or always mean doing or achieving what children want. An effective way to give due weight to the views of children and young people is to give them information that helps them reach a clear position, respect and acknowledge what they want and discuss the safest, most realistic and best decision(s) with them. It is important to be transparent when explaining what is, and what is not, possible and the reasons why decisions are taken.

## How to involve children and young people in decision-making

As noted on page 6, within the context of their own role, objectives, responsibilities and services, organisations should ensure that they seek children and young people's views. They should involve them in decision-making from the earliest stages of the development of all initiatives, at all levels of the organisation and at all parts of the process. A good place to start is to look at the core role of your organisation and ask the questions below.

### 1. What is our focus?

- Practice-based delivery of classes, sessions, clubs, services, support, projects or programmes
- Development of programmes, services, policies, legislation or research
- Development and evaluation of funding schemes
- Several or all of the above.

### 2. How can we involve children and young people at all levels of decision-making?

This Framework offers guidance on how you can involve children and young people at all levels of decision-making.

- If your organisation has a practice-based role and focus, it is important to start by exploring the ways you can involve children and young people in decision-making in their everyday engagement. Use the Everyday Spaces Checklist on page 20 to make sure that children and young people have a voice in the day-to-day classes, sessions, clubs, services, projects or activities you deliver to them.

- If your organisation's role and focus is both at the level of practice and at the level of programme, service, funding, policy or research development, start by using the Everyday Spaces Checklist on page 20 to ensure children and young people have a voice in everyday decision-making. Progress to the Planning Checklist on page 18 to plan for the meaningful involvement of children and young people in decision-making at the more strategic levels of your work.
- If your organisation's role and focus is on developing programmes, services, funding schemes, policies, legislation or research, use the Planning Checklist on page 18 to ensure that children and young people have a meaningful voice in decision-making in these strategic developments.
- If your organisation's role and focus includes all of the objectives listed above, use the Everyday Spaces Checklist on page 20 and Planning Checklist on page 18 to plan for the meaningful involvement of children and young people in decision-making at all levels of your work.

## Guidance on involving children and young people in decision-making at different levels within organisations

### Early learning, care and education settings

- At session level – every child should have a voice in decision-making when selecting daily learning activities, the focus and nature of these activities and how they want to engage.
- At service level – children should have a voice in decision-making on how the service is run.

### Schools

- At classroom level – every child and young person should have a voice in decision-making on approaches to learning and other activities in the classroom.
- At school level – children and young people should have a voice in decision-making in the running of the school, school policies and school governance. Student councils are one way to encourage that voice.

### Youth services

- At club and project level – every child and young person should have a voice in decision-making about the day-to-day activities and methods of engagement in the club or project.
- At organisational level – children and young people should have a voice in decision-making in organisational programmes, plans, policies and events as well as in the governance of the organisation. Structures such as youth panels or youth advisory groups are one mechanism for ensuring this voice is heard.

### Sports

- At practice level – every child and young person in a session, class or club should have a voice in decision-making on ways of ensuring a rewarding and positive engagement.
- At organisational level – children and young people should have a voice in decision-making on the development of programmes, projects, policies, funding schemes and strategic plans.

### **Creative and artistic programmes**

- At practice level – every child and young person in a session, class or club should have a voice in decision-making on the type of programmes they would like, the curating of those programmes and how they engage or interact with them.
- At organisational level – children and young people should have a voice in decision-making on the development of programmes, projects, policies, funding schemes and strategic plans.

### **Government departments, state agencies, hospitals and other organisations that develop and/or deliver services for children and young people**

- At practice or service level – every child and young person should have a voice in decision-making on the services delivered to them.
- At department or organisation level – children and young people should have a voice in decision-making on services, programmes, funding schemes, policies, legislation and research.

## **Permanent structures for the participation of children and young people in decision-making (child and youth councils, student councils, etc.)**

A growing number of organisations and bodies have established permanent structures to give children and young people a voice in decision-making, such as child and youth councils, reference panels, student councils and youth committees. Such structures can be highly effective and there is significant evidence to support the positive impact of the involvement of children and young people in decision-making in children's parliaments, children's councils, children's clubs, conferences and other structures.<sup>14</sup>

However, there are a number of important factors to consider regarding permanent participation structures:

- Before, or in parallel with, establishing a permanent participation structure, look at the everyday ways or spaces that children and young people use to engage with your organisation and develop approaches and mechanisms designed to include their voices in decision-making.
- Permanent structures should never be the only way that organisations ensure the right of children and young people to participate in decision-making. It is critical to use a variety of approaches to listening to and involving them in decision-making, with a particular focus on those who are seldom-heard.
- Permanent structures are not always the most effective way to involve children and young people in decision-making. Guidance should be sought to ensure that the approach to involving them in decision-making matches the purpose of that involvement.

## **Project-based advisory groups of children and young people**

Project-based advisory groups are a very effective way of involving children and young people in decision-making. Such groups are set up to collaborate with decision-makers for the duration a project, programme or consultation, and are:

- a useful way of ensuring the direct involvement of children and young people in decision-making in situations where it is not possible to involve all the children or young people in a community, club, school, project, organisation, service or programme;

- comprised of approximately 6 to 12 children and/or young people;
- often short-term.

It is important to ensure that advisory groups reach out to other children and young people in a community, school, project or other initiative. This can be achieved by:

- collaborating with decision-makers to plan and pilot a consultation or a piece of research that will be conducted with a wider cohort of children or young people;
- developing surveys that will be rolled out to all children in a school, community, organisation or to children and young people nationally;
- working on the development of child- and youth-friendly reports, posters, online resources and other outputs to be shared with wider groups of children and young people.

The benefits of project-based advisory groups include:

- involving children and young people who are affected by a particular issue, disability or situation in decision-making;
- offering children and young people the opportunity to become involved in decision-making based on their interest in a particular hobby, activity, project or initiative;
- enabling organisations to involve a wide range of children and young people in different projects over time;
- offering children and young people the opportunity to become involved in decision-making over a relatively short period of time, without having to commit to a long-term structure or one which has a wide remit.

## How to ensure the involvement of seldom-heard children and young people in decision-making

There are groups of children and young people that organisations struggle to include in decision-making. Among others, these include LGBTI+ children and young people, those with disabilities, those from ethnic minorities, Traveller and Roma children and young people, and young carers. The barriers to involving these groups in decision-making include language barriers, access barriers (including digital access), communication barriers and cultural barriers.<sup>15</sup>

From the initial planning stage, organisations need to identify the barriers that seldom-heard children and young people might encounter and take steps to remove obstacles to their participation in decision-making. Appropriate support should be provided to those who may require it. Practical guidance and advice on effectively involving seldom-heard children and young people in decision-making has been published by the DCYA.<sup>16</sup>

## How to follow up on children and young people's views and give them feedback

The development of policy, strategic plans, services, legislation and research can take months or even years. This factor creates a challenge when involving children and young people in decision-making because they grow up and move on. Decision-makers need to be honest about this and inform children and young people that it may be some time before anything happens to affect change based on their views. On the other hand, unexpected developments such as Covid-19 can result in decision-making at a very fast pace, which also presents challenges. In such situations, it is important not to exclude children and young people and to find ways of engaging with them online as part of the decision-making process.

It is critical to keep track of what happens to the views of children and young people in the process of arriving at final decisions. There is an obligation on decision-makers to demonstrate to rights-holders (children and young people) how due weight has been given to their views. To comply with these obligations, Government departments, State agencies and organisations are advised to appoint an individual to monitor and report on how the views expressed by children and young people are being included in policy, practice and implementation groups, and to ensure the provision of feedback to them throughout the process.

Lundy recommends a four 'Fs' feedback process for consultations or collective decision-making processes with children and young people.<sup>17</sup>

- **Full:** Provide comprehensive feedback to children and young people outlining which of their views were accepted, which were not accepted and the reasons for these decisions. This feedback should also note who is implementing their views and what is happening next.
- **Friendly:** Feedback or responses given by decision-makers to children or young people need to be in a format and language they understand. They need to be informed about the findings of a consultation or survey and about how their views were given due weight.
- **Fast:** Children and young people quickly grow up and move on from things they are involved with, so decision-makers need to give them feedback acknowledging their contribution, outlining initial progress and giving information on next steps as soon as possible. This applies to all key stages and developments.
- **Followed-up:** Decision-makers need to provide ongoing feedback and information to children and young people throughout the policy- or decision-making process.

## Being realistic with children and young people

Adults have a responsibility to advise children and young people on effective ways to be realistic about their expectations. It is important to be honest about the level of your own authority and explore ways to engage with decision-makers who have more authority or power to effect change.

Children and young people do not always get the results they hope for. However, there are positive examples of young people in Comhairle na nÓg using their agency to explore ways to make an impact following the failure of a first attempt.<sup>18</sup> Adults can play a key role in encouraging children and young people not to give up by helping them find other avenues to have their voice heard that are open to new thinking and ideas in both face-to-face and online settings. Adults can also help children and young people by finding partners, establishing networks, coordinating projects and ensuring that organisational arrangements are in place.<sup>19</sup> Although children and young people can be powerful and effective advocates for their own rights, their youth and their relatively powerless status means that they can only sustain this role when adults facilitate the process.<sup>20</sup>

### 3. Overarching Principles

The Committee on the Rights of the Child recommends that State parties integrate nine key requirements or principles into all legislative and other measures for the implementation of CRC Article 12.<sup>21</sup> The Framework is underpinned by these principles, which recommend that all processes in which children and young people are listened to, heard and participate (in person or online), must be:

- **Transparent and informative** – children and young people must be provided with full, accessible, diversity-sensitive and age-appropriate information. They must be told about their right to express their views freely, their right to have their views given due weight, and how their participation will take place, its scope, purpose and potential impact.
- **Voluntary** – children and young people should never be coerced into expressing their views against their wishes, and should be informed that they can stop participating at any stage.
- **Respectful** – children and young people should be provided with opportunities to initiate ideas and activities, and their views should be treated with respect. Adults also need to understand the socioeconomic, environmental and cultural context of their lives.
- **Relevant** – the issues on which children and young people are asked to express their views must be of real relevance to their lives, enabling them to draw on their knowledge, skills and abilities. They should also be asked to address issues they themselves identify as relevant and important.
- **Child friendly** – all environments and working methods should be adapted to children and young people's capacities. Resources must be available to ensure that they are adequately prepared and given the necessary confidence and opportunity to contribute their views. Different levels of support and forms of involvement (according to age and evolving ability) are needed.
- **Inclusive (non-discriminatory)** – participation must be inclusive, avoid patterns of discrimination, and ensure opportunities for marginalised children. Consideration must be given to ensuring that children enjoy equal access to the digital environments necessary for online participation. Children and young people are not a homogenous group – it is essential that equal opportunity is provided for all individuals within that group, so that all voices are heard. Every effort should be made to ensure that programmes are culturally sensitive and free from discrimination.
- **Supported by training** – adults need preparation and support to facilitate children and young people's participation. This includes listening, effective cooperation and knowing how to engage with their evolving capacities.
- **Safe and sensitive to risk** – in certain situations, expressing their views may put children and young people at risk. Adults must take every precaution to minimise the risk of violence, exploitation or any other negative consequence of participating. This includes the development of a clear child protection strategy, which recognises the particular risks faced by some groups and the extra barriers they encounter. It should also pay particular consideration to the risks in the digital environment if children are participating online. Children and young people must be aware of their right to be protected from harm and know where to go for help. Investing in working with families and communities is important for building an understanding of the value and implications of participation, and for minimising the risks.

- **Accountable** – follow-up and evaluation is essential. This includes informing children and young people on how their views have been interpreted and used and, where necessary, giving them the opportunity to challenge and influence the analysis of the findings. Feedback on how their participation has influenced any outcomes is essential. Participation should be monitored and evaluated, where possible, with the children and young people themselves.

## 4. Prioritising Children and Young People's Perspectives

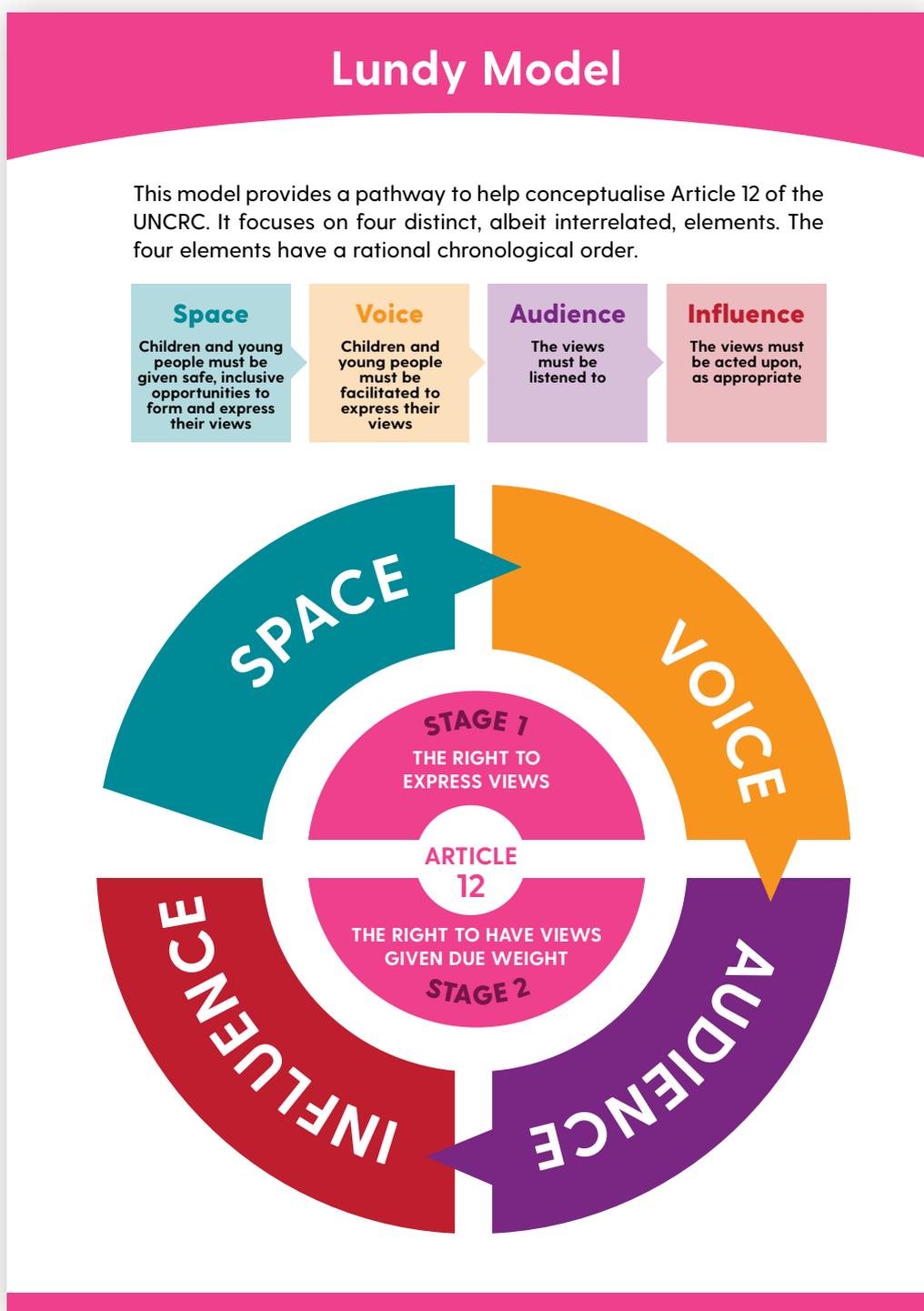
One of the most important principles underpinning the participation of children and young people in decision-making is the importance of providing them with the opportunity to give their own views without undue adult influence. Below is some practical advice for organisations on this principle.

- Seek children and young people's blue-sky thinking rather than always asking them to respond to issues determined by adults.
- Avoid giving them the opinions of other stakeholders or information that could influence their thinking.
- Use a strengths-based approach that starts with children and young people's own experience and understanding.
- Involve children and young people in developing methods that are age-appropriate, engaging and accessible to children and young people with disabilities. Ensure they have a choice about ways to express themselves both in person and online.
- Use open consultation questions or easily understood surveys. Ideally, consultation questions should be devised by an advisory group of children and young people and/or piloted with children and young people in advance.
- Avoid placing adult interpretations on children and young people's views during the process of seeking their opinions.
- Document or report on the views of children and young people in a way that avoids adult interpretation.

The Planning Checklist on page 18 provides comprehensive guidance for decision-makers on how to effectively plan, conduct and evaluate child and youth participation in decision-making in the development of policies, plans, services, governance, research and legislation at national, local and organisational level.

## 5. Model of Participation

The National Participation Strategy is underpinned by a rights-based model of participation developed by Professor Laura Lundy.<sup>22</sup> In collaboration with Professor Lundy, a revised version of the model was developed for the Framework. It provides decision-makers with guidance on the steps to take in order to give children and young people a meaningful voice in decision-making.



## Ways that children and young people can participate in decision-making

Children and young people can participate in decision-making in three different ways:

- Consultative
- Collaborative
- Child/youth-led.<sup>23</sup>

According to Lansdown, these modes or ways of participating should not be perceived as a hierarchy. All three modes may be appropriate in different contexts, providing they are rights-based and comply with Lundy's elements of space, voice, audience and influence. In practice, many child/youth participation projects or programmes use all three modes of participation. So, for example, it may begin with adults consulting young people, after which adults and young people work on some aspects together and young people lead on other aspects on their own. The good practice examples in Appendix 2 of this Framework illustrate examples of the use of consultative, collaborative and child/youth-led projects, initiatives and meetings.

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## 6. Framework Checklists and Feedback Forms

### Framework Checklists

Three framework checklists and a series of Children and Young People's Feedback Forms provide a simple but structured way to guide decision-makers in the use of the Lundy model and good practice principles. These tools support organisations in effectively planning, conducting and evaluating child and youth participation (face-to-face and online) processes and initiatives as well as giving children and young people a voice in decision-making in everyday spaces or settings.

- The Planning Checklist (page 18) provides guidance to departments, agencies and organisations on listening to children and young people and involving them in decision-making in the development of policies, plans, services, programmes, governance, research and legislation at national, local and organisational level.
- The Evaluation Checklist (page 19) is a tool for self-evaluation and external evaluation to be used by departments, agencies and organisations following the completion of policies, plans, services, programmes, governance, research and legislation.
- The Everyday Spaces Checklist (page 20) provides guidance to teachers, early years' practitioners, social workers, youth workers, youth club volunteers, sports coaches and other adults on listening to children and young people and giving them a voice in decision-making in everyday spaces or settings, in person or online. This checklist should not be used for developing policies, plans, services, programmes, governance, research and legislation. For these developments, please use the Planning Checklist on page 18.
- The Children and Young People's Feedback Forms for groups enable children and young people to evaluate face-to-face (page 21) and online (page 22) consultations, meetings, events, surveys and other activities or projects during which they are asked for their views. These forms should be completed at the end of meetings, events or activities.
- The Children and Young People's Feedback Form for individuals (page 23) enables individual children and young people to evaluate meetings and other engagements with adult decision-makers either in person or online.

# Planning Checklist

This checklist guides you on how to listen to children and young people and involve them in decision-making when you are developing policies, plans, services, programmes, governance, research and legislation at national, local and organisational level.

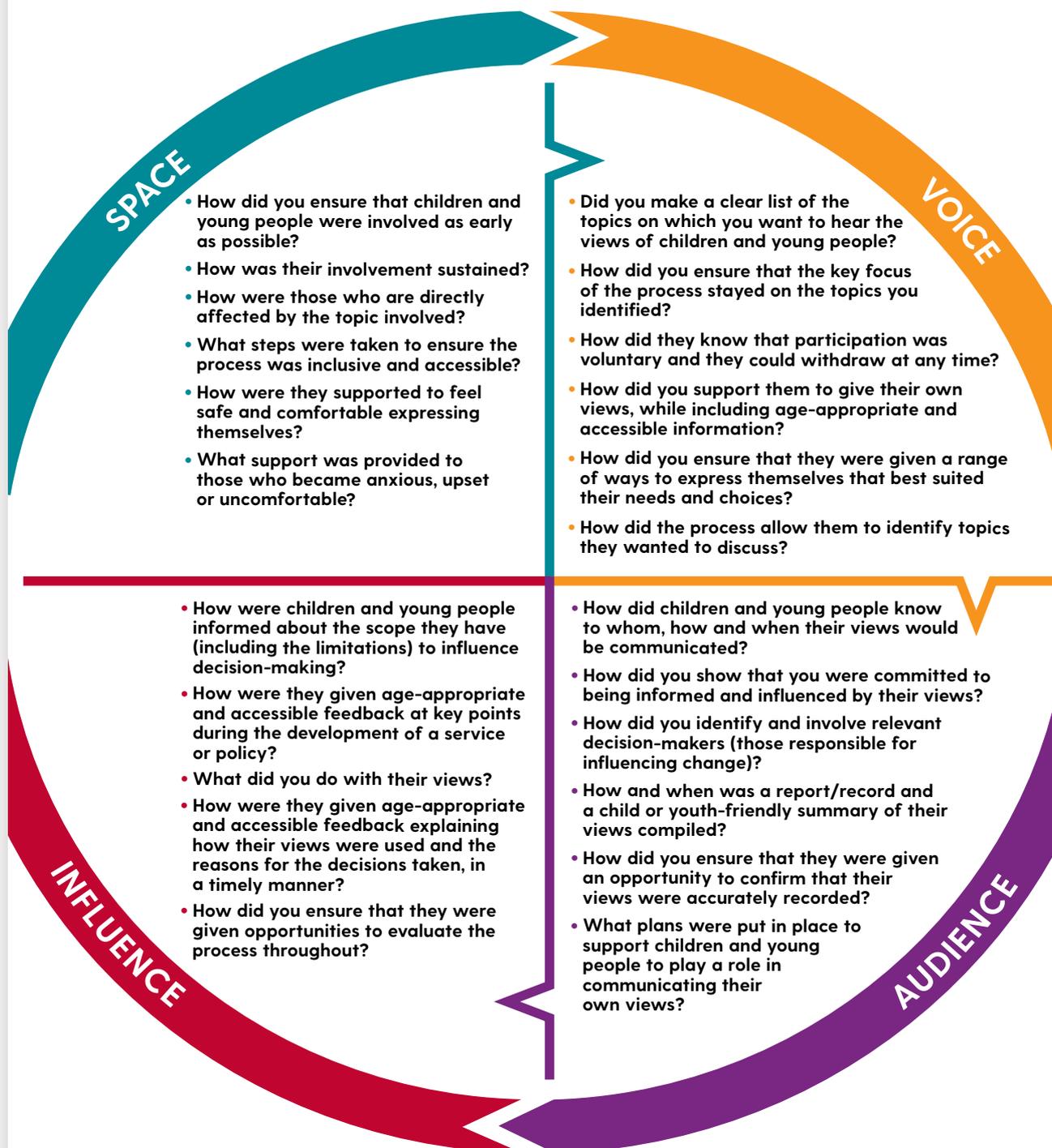
You should inform children and young people that they have the right to a voice in decision-making and that you will take their views seriously.



Before you start involving children and young people in decision-making, please review the enabling factors on page 24.

# Evaluation Checklist

This checklist is a guide for the self-evaluation and external evaluation of policies, plans, services, programmes, governance, research and legislation at national, local and organisational level.



# Everyday Spaces Checklist

This checklist is designed as a guide to help you ensure that children and young people have a voice in decision-making. It can be applied in many everyday situations including in classrooms, hospitals, childcare settings, child and youth services, youth and sports clubs, youth projects, arts and creative initiatives and other spaces.

Please do not use this checklist for developing policies, plans, services, programmes, governance, research and legislation – use the Planning Checklist on page 18.

Please make sure that the ways you involve children and young people in decision-making are age-appropriate and accessible for all, whether in person or online.



# Children and Young People's Feedback Form (for groups)

Boy       Girl       Other       I don't know       Age \_\_\_\_\_

**Tick the number of stars you would give to everything below. Five stars is the best.**

<b>SPACE</b>	★	★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★★★
I have been listened to from the start					
I felt comfortable giving my opinions					
I felt safe giving my opinions					
A lot of different voices were included					

<b>VOICE</b>	★	★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★★★
I got the chance to give my opinions					
I got enough information to help me give my opinion					
I got support to have my voice heard					
I understood what was being discussed					
I could give my opinions whatever way I wanted					
I had enough time to talk					

<b>AUDIENCE</b>	★	★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★★★
I know who wants to hear our opinions					
I know why they want the opinions of young people					
They were honest about what they would try to do with our opinions					

<b>INFLUENCE</b>	★	★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★★★
I know where our opinions are going next					
I know how we will be told about what happens to our opinions					
I think what we said today will be taken seriously					

**What were the best things about today?**

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

**What would you change about today?**

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

The FOOD was...

The ROOM was...

**THANK YOU!**

# Children and Young People's Online Feedback Form (for groups)

Boy       Girl       Other       I don't know       Age \_\_\_\_\_

**Tick the number of stars you would give to everything below. Five stars is the best.**

<b>SPACE</b>	★	★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★★★
I have been listened to from the start					
I felt comfortable giving my opinions					
I felt safe giving my opinions					
A lot of different voices were included					

<b>VOICE</b>	★	★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★★★
I got the chance to give my opinions					
I got enough information to help me give my opinion					
I got support to have my voice heard					
I understood what was being discussed					
I could give my opinions whatever way I wanted					
I had enough time to talk					

<b>AUDIENCE</b>	★	★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★★★
I know who wants to hear our opinions					
I know why they want the opinions of young people					
They were honest about what they would try to do with our opinions					

<b>INFLUENCE</b>	★	★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★★★
I know where our opinions are going next					
I know how we will be told about what happens to our opinions					
I think what we said today will be taken seriously					

Were you able to get onto the platform?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

Was it easy to use?

.....

.....

.....

.....

The ONLINE SPACE was...

THANK YOU!

# Children and Young People's Feedback Form (for individuals)

Boy       Girl       Other       I don't know       Age \_\_\_\_\_

Tick the number of stars you would give to everything below. Five stars is the best.

<b>SPACE</b>	★	★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★★★
I was listened to from the start					
I felt comfortable giving my opinions					
I felt safe giving my opinions					

<b>VOICE</b>	★	★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★★★
I got the chance to give my opinions					
I got enough information to help me give my opinions					
I got support to have my voice heard					
I understood what was being discussed					
I could give my opinions whatever way I wanted					
I had enough time to talk					

<b>AUDIENCE</b>	★	★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★★★
I know who wants to hear my opinions					
I know why they want my opinions					
They were honest about what they would try to do with my opinions					

<b>INFLUENCE</b>	★	★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★★★
I know where my opinions are going next					
I know how I will be told about what happens to my opinions					
I think what I said today will be taken seriously					

**Is there anything else that would have helped you in giving your opinions?**

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

**THANK YOU!**

## 7. Enabling Factors

Four enabling factors underpin the effective implementation of the Framework. Departments, agencies and organisations that strive to involve children and young people in decision-making need to ensure that the following factors are in place:

- Organisational buy-in
- Training and capacity building for decision-makers
- Resources (financial, human, time)
- Monitoring and evaluation.

### Organisational buy-in

- Organisations need to buy-in and commit to ensuring the right of children and young people to a voice in decision-making, and invest the human and financial resources required to do so effectively.
- Strong organisational leadership is a key enabler in ensuring that children and young people's participation in decision-making is sustainable. The support of the chief executive or head of an organisation is essential.<sup>24</sup>
- A shared commitment to child and youth participation in decision-making needs to be demonstrated by management and staff.
- "Organisational change is essential to ensuring meaningful participation by children and young people in decisions that affect them. Participation must be embedded within the infrastructure of an organisation and progress beyond one-off, discrete activities, to become an ongoing embedded process."<sup>25</sup>

### Training and capacity building

- Training and skills-needs analyses should be conducted using the Framework Planning Checklist.
- Appropriate training in child and youth participation needs to be made available to relevant staff.
- Training and capacity building must be included in organisational plans and work plans.

### Resources (financial, human, time)

- Financial resources should be assigned to support child and youth participation initiatives.
- Human resources should be assigned to support child and youth participation initiatives.
- Business and work plans need to reflect the human and financial resources and time required for effective child and youth participation initiatives.
- Funding schemes need to include criteria that require the involvement of children and young people in decision-making.
- Decision-makers should use the Framework Planning Checklist to identify the resources that are required.

### Monitoring and evaluation

- Decision-makers should use the Framework Feedback Checklist to monitor child participation initiatives.
- The external evaluation of initiatives needs to be undertaken using the Framework Feedback Checklist in a way that complements the use of other evaluation tools.
- Evidence from the Framework and other evaluation tools must inform the development of policy, services and practice.

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## Appendix 1 – Domestic legislative measures that require the voice of the child to be heard in specific contexts

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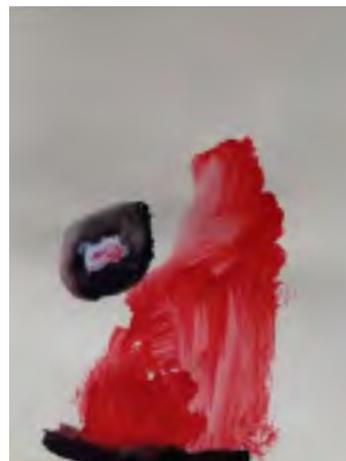
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## Appendix 2 – Good practice examples

### A parent's story about the impact on children of having their voices heard

Every morning, my two-year-old daughter cried on the short walk over to her crèche. One day, on seeing an electrician fixing the broken doorbell, the children suggested: "Why don't you get a new doorbell and put it down low so we can ring it." The crèche owner readily agreed. The height of the smallest child was used to ensure that all the children could reach, and the new doorbell was installed. Since that day, my daughter has skipped over to crèche excited in the knowledge she can ring the doorbell herself. This has meant happier, stress free mornings for everyone: my daughter, us (her parents) and the childcare workers. Something so small and insignificant to the adult world has made a huge difference to her daily routine.



*A child's picture of the red crèche door and new doorbell*

### How the children were ensured SPACE, VOICE, AUDIENCE and INFLUENCE

#### SPACE

- The children felt safe to express their views in the familiar setting of their crèche.
- The decision-makers (staff and crèche owner) allowed time to listen to the children.
- The staff and crèche owner made sure that all the children were heard.

#### VOICE

- The children were able to raise an issue that mattered to them.
- The children were able to suggest a solution that would work for them.

#### AUDIENCE

- The staff and crèche owner showed the children that they were ready and willing to listen to them.
- They made it clear that they were willing to do something about the children's views.

#### INFLUENCE

- The staff and crèche owner showed the children that they were ready and willing to listen to them.
- They made it clear that they were willing to do something about the children's views.

## The voice of children in a pre-school project

### Creative Kids & Co.

At Creative Kids & Co., the most important aspect of our work is children's participation in decision-making in their own learning. The children feel safe and are confident in telling us their views because we include them in decisions daily and they know we take their opinions seriously.

In the pre-school, we had been looking at famous buildings around the world. We asked families to discuss with the children what their favourite building is. Cillian's mother emailed us that his favourite building was the house where his granny was born, No. 4 Castle Street, Dublin, a Georgian building.

During circle time, we asked if anyone knew anything about Georgian buildings and Cillian replied: "I know that everyone in Castle Street had to live in the same room." We showed the children a photo of No.4 while talking to them about Cillian's connection to the house. Over the next few days, we spoke with the children about Georgian architecture and Dublin tenement life. We asked the children if they would like to meet Cillian's granny to learn more about life in Castle Street. They were very keen, so we arranged a visit.

Nanny Maureen came to the pre-school and told the children what life was like in No. 4 when she lived there. "We all lived in the one room," she told the children, "and our toilet was outside!" To which Nathan replied, "WHY?"

We asked the children if they had any questions for Nanny Maureen.

"Did you have a car?" asked Rajaharish.

"No," replied Maureen.

"How did you travel then?" responded Noah in shock.

"We travelled by bus or by bike, you had to be very rich to have a car," answered Maureen with a giggle.

Nanny Maureen answered all the questions the children had. At the end of her visit, we asked if they would like to visit Maureen's first home. They were very enthusiastic about the idea. We talked about how we could get there: "We could get there on a bus, does anyone's dad drive a bus?"

"MINE DOES, MY DAD DOES," shouted Michael. We asked Michael's dad if he could arrange for a bus to bring the children and staff to the house and he agreed to help.

We also contacted the tenants in No. 4 Castle Street and they were delighted for the children to visit the building.

Finally, the day arrived for our big trip, and armed with high-viz jackets, some very helpful parents and our guest of honour Nanny Maureen, we walked out to the bus where John was waiting for us. Michael almost exploded with pride.

John parked near the ancient walls of Dublin Castle and we walked to No. 4. The highlight of the tour was visiting the first floor room where Maureen lived with her family when she was the same age as Cillian. As we entered the room Maureen exclaimed, "I'm home."

"This is where Nanny slept and lived," announced a very proud Cillian.

We made sure that the children's voices were heard throughout the visit by encouraging them to ask questions and make suggestions about the things they wanted to see in the building.

All the way through this journey, we constantly consulted with the children in large groups, small groups and at individual level – we listened carefully, took notes, and spoke to them honestly about what would work and what might not. This made it possible for the children to make most of the decisions for themselves.

Our visit to No. 4 Castle Street was amazing, and it all started with a child's favourite building. This project confirmed for us that when children are listened to and facilitated to participate in decision-making, they drive their own learning.

### How the children were ensured SPACE, VOICE, AUDIENCE and INFLUENCE

#### SPACE

- The children felt safe to express their views in the familiar setting of their pre-school.
- The decision-makers (pre-school practitioners) allowed time to listen to the children.
- The pre-school practitioners made sure that all the children were heard.

#### VOICE

- The children were asked to name their favourite buildings, which was something that mattered to them.
- The children were asked to talk about their buildings.
- The children were asked if they would like Nanny Maureen to visit them.
- The children were asked if they knew anyone who drives a bus.

#### AUDIENCE

- The pre-school practitioners asked the children to suggest their favourite buildings, showing them that they are ready and willing to listen to them.
- The pre-school practitioners made it clear that they were willing to do something about the children's views by engaging with other adult audiences (Nanny Maureen, the bus driver, the tenants of No. 4 Castle Street).

#### INFLUENCE

- The practitioners acted on the children's enthusiasm and views by taking them on a trip to No. 4 Castle Street.
- The children were able to see the impact of Cillian's pride in his favourite building by being brought there and hearing Nanny Maureen talk about living in one room; and Michael's pride in his dad being the bus driver who took them there.
- The children were able to make decisions about what they wanted to see in No. 4 Castle Street.
- The children were consulted in a variety of ways and supported to be the decision-makers at all stages.

## Young people's involvement in the development of a programme for school leavers

### Clare Youth Service

#### 1. How the topic was identified

- The topic was identified by two youth workers, based on interactions with young people facing the transition from second-level education.
- The Youth Advocate provides career guidance to young people across County Clare. The Youth Information Team in Clare Youth Service runs programmes, talks and presentations on the topic but the uptake was inconsistent. However, during outreach sessions with youth workers, young people regularly expressed concern and stress about the transition they faced. The youth workers decided to consult young people facing this transition to ensure that the programmes on offer matched their needs.
- They developed a consultation methodology with a pilot group of young people, with a view to conducting consultations more widely once the methodology was completed.

#### 2. The young people's participation in the decision-making

- The key decision-makers in the Youth Service are the management team, Chief Executive Officer and the Board of Directors.
- Other key decision-makers include the Youth Information Team, the Youth Advocate, other Youth Service staff, Community Training Centre Management, Youthreach Centres, Principals, Guidance Counsellors and other local education partners.
- The young people in the pilot group and the consultation group were also important decision-makers.

#### 3. How the views of young people were sought, and how they affected the decisions

##### SPACE

- All young people involved in both the pilot group and the consultation group were either experiencing the transition from second-level to further study/work or facing it in the coming year.
- The pilot group consisted of four young people (two girls and two boys) in Year 2 of the Leaving Certificate Applied Programme, aged between 16 and 19. They were attending the Community Training Centre, a supported educational setting for young people at risk of leaving education early.
- The consultation group included 15 young people (aged 17 to 21) on a Work Experience Programme.
- Both groups included young people whose voices have been seldom heard, and who experienced difficulties in mainstream education and in approaching the transition by themselves.
- All the young people consulted were at risk of leaving school early or not following through with further education/work placements. There was a mix of young people from urban and rural areas.
- The consultation was in a comfortable room with adequate heat and seating.
- The consultation was held at a time and venue that suited the participants.
- There was an atmosphere of mutual respect with a strong emphasis on communication in a safe space.

*continued*

- The topic was relevant to them: the young people in the pilot group were facing the transition from second-level school and those in the consultation group had already started that transition, having left school and entered a supported work placement initiative.
- Opportunities were provided for the young people to take part in smaller groups and to vote using non-verbal methods if they did not want to speak in a large group.
- The facilitators were aware of the literacy levels of the young people, and were able to ensure that the activities suited needs of the group.

## VOICE

- The purpose of the consultation, the choice of methods and how those methods were decided was clearly explained to the young people.
- They were informed that participation was voluntary and arrangements were made for any young person who did not wish to take part.
- A range of methods were used with the pilot and the consultation groups to maximise participation opportunities for everyone.
- Young people from the pilot group were involved in choosing the topic, questions and methods.
- The pilot group used a timeline method to map out all the decisions, challenges and opportunities that moving on from second-level brings and to choose the issues to be included in a programme for young people leaving school.
- Based on feedback from the pilot group, the consultation group used the timeline method to focus their thoughts and then worked in small groups to map out the decisions, challenges and opportunities they felt moving on from second-level education would bring them.
- An open space method was used for young people to choose and categorise the things they wanted in a programme for leaving school.
- A world café method allowed young people to share their ideas on each category using a jotter page method.
- Finally using sticky dots, the young people voted on their top two issues in each category.
- Their top choices formed the basis for the objectives/learning outcomes for the Youth Information Leaving School Programme. These were shared with the strategic partners to inform their programme planning and needs assessments.

## AUDIENCE

- The young people were informed about who would see the findings of the consultation.
- The facilitator's role was explained, and the young people were told what would happen with the findings of the consultation.
- The young people's views and opinions were compiled into a poster that was shared with relevant people (Youthreach Centres/Principals/Guidance Counsellors).
- Young people were informed that their views would be used by the Youth Information Team to develop a Leaving School Programme for 2020.
- The young people were informed that their views and opinions would be shared with Clare Youth Service Management, the Chief Executive Officer and the Board of Directors (who have overall say in the programmes run by Clare Youth Service).

## **INFLUENCE**

- The young people were told when to expect feedback from the consultation.
- The young people's views and opinions were taken seriously by the Youth Information Team and were used to develop the new Leaving School Programme.
- The young people were informed that the new programme would mention their contribution.
- Facilitated by the Youth Advocate, the young people's views and opinions were discussed by the Community Training Centre and Youthreach staff following the consultation.
- After the consultation, the management team and Chief Executive Officer examined the document and gave the young people feedback.
- The young people evaluated the consultation process.

### **4. The key findings of the consultation**

The concerns and needs of this target group are wide, varied and yet consistent with other evidence we have encountered in more informal settings. Below are the top issues young people would like addressed by a preparation programme for school leavers.

#### **1. Accommodation**

- Rent allowance and entitlements

#### **2. Education**

- Choosing the right college/PLC course
- How to apply for travel allowances

#### **3. Working**

- What are my rights? (holidays/wages/sick leave)

#### **4. Life skills**

- How to be a responsible parent
- How to quit smoking

#### **5. Supports**

- Where to get help generally
- Rights

#### **6. Budgeting**

- How to get a mortgage or how to pay other monthly bills like insurance
- How to keep a record of funds

#### **7. Being given a voice about their experiences**

- Space to talk about their experiences rather than just receiving information or guidance

## **5. Lessons learned**

- It would have worked better if, from the start of the year, time had been allocated in the work plans of the Youth Information Team and the Youth Advocate for cross-team consultations with young people.
- We learned from the pilot group that one of the methods used did not adequately capture the young people's views.
- If Covid-19 had not happened we would have been able to complete this project more quickly.

## **6. Subsequent developments**

- A logic model for the content of the Leaving School Programme has been developed.
- Session guidelines and a PowerPoint presentation to be used during the programme have been developed.
- These guidelines have been reviewed in two sessions by Leaving Certificate Applied students.
- Plans have been made for a group of young people to work with the Youth Information Team on developing a booklet to accompany the programme.

# Young people's involvement in the development of a Climate Justice Action Plan

## Foróige

### 1. How the topic was identified

- In October 2019, Foróige's Reference Panel identified climate justice as an issue affecting all of society and young people in particular. It called on the organisation to consider making this a key topic for 2020. The Foróige Reference Panel is a group of up to 64 young people who represent the views of all 50,000 members of Foróige, from clubs to projects, to youth services and programmes. The work of the Reference Panel directly affects and influences how Foróige operates and ensures that young people's voices are heard in the running of the youth organisation.
- Young people on the Reference Panel felt that more needed to be done to reverse the climate crisis, and that education for both young people and adults was needed to highlight the inequalities in terms of those affected by climate change.
- In January and February 2020, almost 1,000 young people engaged in Foróige's clubs, projects and services, and attended Foróige's Regional Conferences and Seminars (youth consultation events) across the country. These events enable young people in Foróige to identify key topics important to young people and make recommendations for the organisation on these topics. The need for more action on climate change and tackling the climate crisis was a key topic identified at these events; young people felt more needed to be done to support them to take action on climate justice.
- At the first meeting of the newly elected 2020 Reference Panel in April 2020 (held online due to Covid-19), a report summarising the Regional Conferences and Seminars was presented. Each individual Reference Panel member was also given a report on the Regional Conference or Seminar that elected them. This ensured that Reference Panel members were fully aware of the recommendations made by young people in Foróige on the topic of climate justice.
- The Reference Panel highlighted a number of key areas for the organisation to consider in the development of an action plan on climate justice. This included:
  - » young people to be the key drivers of a national climate justice initiative in Foróige;
  - » the establishment of a youth advocacy panel to ensure that young people had a direct say in all aspects of the initiative and could promote the topic to other young people, the public and policy-makers;
  - » the development of trainings and workshops for staff and volunteers on the topic of climate justice and ways to support young people in taking action;
  - » the development of a climate justice programme for young people;
  - » the establishment of Climate Justice Ambassadors in Foróige clubs, groups and projects;
  - » national and local social media campaigns to highlight the issue and things people can do to take action;
  - » a Climate Justice Digital Youth Conference.

### 2. The young people's participation in the decision-making

- The audience for this initiative was organisation-wide and included young people from the Foróige Reference Panel, almost 1,000 young Foróige members who attended Regional Conferences and Seminars, young people on the Foróige Ecollective, the National Chairperson of Foróige and the Board of Foróige, the CEO of Foróige, members of the Senior Management Team and staff and volunteers with expertise in child and youth participation and other key areas (such as training and programmes, marketing, communications and event management).
- All these stakeholders played a role in final decisions on the Climate Justice Action Plan, which was initiated and led by young people.

### 3. How the views of young people were sought, and how they affected the decisions

#### SPACE

- The first step, and key to the Foróige Climate Justice Initiative, was the establishment of a national youth advocacy panel. Members of the panel were young people interested in making a positive difference to climate justice, being ambassadors for climate justice and ensuring young people's voices were at the centre of all decision-making.
- The role of the youth advocacy panel was: to frame the direction of the organisation on climate justice; to make recommendations on policy, guidelines, educational programme developments, trainings, research, and key strategic partnerships; to advocate at a local, national and international level; and to lead on a number initiatives.
- Following a meeting of members of Foróige's Senior Management Team, a strategy was put in place to ensure the youth advocacy panel had diverse membership from across Foróige clubs, projects and services (and in terms of age, gender and location).
- Furthermore, a member of the Senior Management Team with significant experience in child and youth participation in decision-making was assigned to support the work of the group.
- Due to the impact of Covid-19, all meetings were held online through Zoom. This presented an initial challenge to group formation as members of the group had not met each other or the staff and volunteers in place to support them. To develop group cohesion, a group dynamic and a feeling of safety from the outset, staff and volunteers facilitated fun and interactive ice breakers and group activities, and used small break-out discussion groups.
- Initial meetings with the youth advocacy panel also included a clear explanation of their role, the roles of staff, volunteers and expert advisors, and other key staff who joined the group at various stages. Following this, the group expressed the need to decide their own name. They are now known as the Foróige Ecollective. The group also developed a contract outlining behaviour and expectations.
- Child safeguarding procedures were put in place, including parental consent, a child safeguarding statement, the appropriate ratio of staff to young people, guidelines for group work online, attendance monitoring and records of all meetings.

#### VOICE

- Meeting logistics for the Foróige Ecollective were decided in consultation with the group to ensure they happened at a time and day suitable to them. Group meetings were initially held every two weeks, then every week as their work programme developed.
- The staff and volunteers who facilitated the group provided ongoing support and ensured the use of youth friendly methodologies during meetings.
- At the first meeting of the group, the Director of Programmes and Research presented a youth friendly version of the application to the DCYA Youth Climate Justice Fund and clearly outlined both the role of the Foróige Ecollective and where the views of the group would influence the Foróige Climate Justice Initiative across the coming months.
- A youth friendly presentation 'What is Climate Justice' was presented to the group by an external expert in the subject, and followed by a Q&A session. This information session was a great success and the external expert remained with the group in a volunteer capacity throughout the initiative.

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- The Foróige staff responsible for the initiative's key actions attended the relevant meetings of the Ecollective. Members of the group were told which staff member was attending in advance and which action of the Climate Justice Initiative they would be consulting with the group on. Staff members who attended meetings of the Foróige Ecollective met with the facilitator of the collective in advance to prepare for the meeting and ensure their presentation, facilitation methodologies and consultation questions were suitable to the needs of the group and appropriate for influencing the direction of the Climate Justice Initiative.
- A variety of methodologies were used to ensure that group members had different options for expressing their views, ideas and opinions during each meeting. These included large and small group discussions, interactive whiteboards, videos, chat functions and asking each member in turn to share their views. The use of a variety of methodologies helped to ensure all young people had the opportunity to have their voice heard.

## AUDIENCE

- The Director of Programmes and Research presented at the initial meeting of the Foróige Ecollective and clearly outlined where the group's views would influence the Foróige Climate Justice Initiative, and how in turn this would influence the whole organisation.
- An internal Climate Justice Initiative steering group was also formed as part of the Climate Justice Initiative and was made up of Foróige staff, management and the Senior Management Team with responsibility for actions under the Climate Justice Initiative. The Foróige Ecollective was informed about this group and that a report of their meetings would be presented by their staff-support person at each meeting of the Climate Justice Initiative steering group.
- The staff-support person who facilitated the group was in a position to ensure that appropriate decision-makers engaged with the young people throughout the process.
- The staff responsible for the Climate Justice Initiative attended meetings of the Foróige Ecollective and engaged in consultations and discussions with them on areas such as programme development, a Climate Justice Checklist and Awards, training for adults and young people, a social media campaign, a podcast series and a Digital Youth Conference. At all meetings, young people were made aware of how their views, ideas and opinions would influence each step of the process.
- At the online meeting of the Foróige Reference Panel in October, members of the Foróige Ecollective presented their role, explained climate justice, and talked about how young people can make a positive difference to climate justice and the various actions and activities under the Foróige Climate Justice Initiative. The group also asked for feedback and ideas on the Digital Youth Conference, and on how best to engage young people in Foróige on climate justice.
- The Foróige Ecollective worked together with staff from Foróige Marketing and Communications to research, script and present their own 10-episode climate justice podcast series 'Future-Proof Living'. This has been made available on all podcast platforms.
- A member of the Foróige Ecollective provided input about and an update on the group's activities and the actions of the Climate Justice Initiative at a meeting of the Board of Foróige.

## INFLUENCE

- The Foróige Ecollective made recommendations on all aspects of the Climate Justice Initiative. This included the:
  - » look and design of all branding;
  - » content of the Foróige Future-Proof Programme;
  - » content and methodologies used in the training for staff and volunteers to facilitate the Foróige Future-Proof Programme;
  - » content and methodologies used for the Climate Justice Workshop for staff and volunteers;
  - » content and process of the Foróige Future-Proof Climate Justice Checklist;
  - » outline, content and guest list of the Foróige Future-Proof Digital Youth Conference;
  - » guests, research, scripting and presenting of the Foróige Future-Proof Living podcast series.
- Notes from all the meetings were compiled and a report was presented at each meeting of the internal climate justice steering group. Staff support for the group checked that the notes were accurate and their views and opinions were recorded correctly.
- All staff, volunteers and external experts who attended meetings of the Foróige Ecollective provided feedback to the group on how their views, ideas and opinions were used or not, through written reports and/or attendance at follow-up meetings.
- Each meeting of the Foróige Ecollective included 'updates' as part of the agenda. This ensured that the group was informed of finalised decisions at all stages of the development of the various actions under the initiative.

## 4. Lessons learned

- While reflecting on and evaluating this initiative, one of the key areas highlighted by everyone was the importance of time; ensuring and planning for enough time for 'space, voice, audience and influence' to happen meaningfully.
- This initiative involved multiple stakeholders and multiple projects happening simultaneously, each one working towards a deadline. It inevitably took longer to carry out a number of the tasks than originally planned. As with most funding models, criteria under the Youth Climate Justice Fund of the Department of Children and Youth Affairs included the need for grant funding to be spent within a timeframe and by a deadline. At times, this put pressure on the Foróige Ecollective group and the group facilitators to ensure all four areas of the framework were happening while also 'getting the job done'.
- It is clear that participation takes time and, as is often the case, more time than is anticipated. Going forward, it will be important to plan for the unexpected and build this into the project timeline. This will help to ensure young people have the appropriate time and space to participate in all aspects of decision-making.

## Young people's involvement in the development of a Halloween Programme in Lava Javas Youth Café, Limerick City

### Limerick Youth Service

#### 1. How the topic was identified

- Lava Javas is a youth café in Limerick city centre for young people aged between 14 and 19.
- The Lava Javas Youth Committee consists of eight young people who come together weekly to discuss current issues of interest, as advocates for the young people in the Lava Javas youth café. This committee consists of five girls and three boys aged between 15 and 19. These young people attend various schools and are from different areas in Limerick.
- The Youth Committee decided that it would be great to have an event on Halloween for the young people of Lava Javas youth café to allow them to hang out in a safe, friendly, drug- and alcohol-free space. They also felt it would be a good opportunity to use this event as a 're-opening' for Lava Javas as a new youth worker was now running the project, and had re-opened the café fully. It was hoped that more young people would start to attend the café on a more consistent basis as a result of this event, by showing what it can offer young people, and advertising it online.
- They decided to get the opinions of a wider group of young people by consulting them on what the Halloween event should be like.
- On 23 October 2019, the Youth Committee members developed draft consultation questions and piloted the method and questions as a group. Following the pilot, they made some changes to the method and questions. The revised method and questions were used to consult with a broader group of young people who use the youth café.
  - » Topic: Halloween in Lava Javas – Have your say.
  - » Questions:
    1. What Halloween activities would you like to see at the Lava Javas Halloween party?
    2. In your opinion, what is the best time of the day to hold the Halloween party?
- On 25 October 2019, 55 young people were consulted on the topic 'Halloween in Lava Javas – Have your say' during the night of the youth café. These young people were between 14 and 19 years old and came to the café from all over Limerick City and County, with a small number from Clare and Cork. The young people were from various demographics and identified as male, female and non-binary.

#### 2. The young people's participation in the decision-making

- The audience (decision-makers) for this consultation and event were the youth workers and the young people on the committee, who were highly involved in the consultation process. These decision-makers took every young person's opinion and ideas seriously.
- The committee members drew up an event plan, which included as many ideas as possible from the consultation.

### 3. How the views of young people were sought, and how they affected the decisions

#### SPACE

- The Lava Javas youth café is run by young people for young people.
- The young people from the committee were involved from the very start and helped to determine the topic and questions.
- The involvement of the committee was sustained throughout, from running the broader consultation with 55 young people to using the findings of the consultation to design the Halloween event.
- The young people on the committee, and those who attended the consultation, were interested in the issue because it directly affected them. They were all able to identify how they wanted the event to be run.
- The process was very inclusive.
- The members of the café felt safe to give their opinions because they were in a comfortable and familiar environment.
- Each committee member ensured everyone wrote their opinions on the walls. They supported the young people if they needed help with spelling, and they gave them lots of space and time to write.

#### VOICE

- On 25 October 2019, the committee held a consultation with 55 young café users, using an open-space approach to capture the views of the constant flow of young people coming in and out throughout the evening.
- Two flipchart sheets were hung on the wall with the consultation questions:
- What Halloween activities would you like to see at the Lava Javas Halloween party?
- In your opinion, what is the best time of the day to hold the Halloween party?
- Young people were invited to write their ideas on Post-its throughout the night, this anonymised the ideas.
- The questions allowed young people to write whatever ideas they wished.
- Near the end of the evening, the committee members categorised the Post-its and left the categories on the wall so that the café members could see everyone's ideas clearly. This ensured that each young person in the café knew their opinions had influenced the categories.
- An evaluation form, the 'my opinion' evaluation method, was used in order to gauge how the young people found the open-space Halloween consultation.

#### AUDIENCE

- The decision-makers for this event were the youth worker and the youth committee.
- The young people giving their views on the Halloween event knew who wanted their views and why they wanted them.
- The decision-makers promised to take every young person's opinions and ideas seriously.
- Following the broader consultation with the 55 young people, the youth committee members discussed the feasibility of the suggestions provided at the consultation in the Lava Javas youth café.

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- Each category was looked at and the committee members made a plan to ensure that the Halloween event included as many ideas and opinions as possible. They decided that the ideas that could not be included in the Halloween event would be used for future events or activities in Lava Javas.
- All young café users were informed about the time of the event and the activities to be included before Halloween.

## INFLUENCE

- When the young people were asked to give their opinions, they were informed that the event would be held in Lava Javas youth café, which allowed them to make suggestions that might work in the space.
- The evaluation, which was filled out at the end of the consultation, captured how the young people felt about being involved and listened to.
- The views of the young people were written up the night the consultation took place.
- All their ideas were given proper consideration.
- An event timetable was written up that listed all the activities. This ensured that the young people knew exactly what happened in response to their ideas from the consultation.
- The committee members explained to the young people who were consulted why some of their ideas were not included in the event and what would happen to those ideas. Several of these ideas were used at events in the weeks after Halloween (e.g. a Christmas movie night, decoration of Christmas cupcakes and decoration of Valentine's Day cupcakes).

Below are the findings from the consultation. The text highlighted in yellow are the activities that the youth committee decided would be feasible. The event was from 3pm to 7pm, the time chosen by the majority of those consulted.

### Key Findings- Consultation

**Q1: What Halloween Activities would you like to see at the Lava Javas Halloween party?**

• Face Painting (x 14)	• BAKING - Decorating Halloween Cupcakes
• Table quiz (x7)	• MUSIC - Karaoke, Live, Make a Halloween music playlist.
• FOOD- Barm Brack, Sweets and coke	• Special FX makeup
• ART - Create your own masks (x2)	• MOVIES- x13 (Hocus pocus x1)
• Fancy Dress/ costume contest (x11)	• XBOX- Fifa Tournament
• HALLOWEEN GAMES - Bobbing for Apples (x 7), Hanging apple from ceiling (x2), Grape and Flour game (x3)	• Halloween decorations
• Hide and seek	

**Q2: In your opinion, what is the best time of the day to hold the Halloween party?**

- 50% of young people said that a 3pm start would be perfect.
- 40% said between 4 and 7 pm
- 5% said 2pm start
- 5% said 8pm finish

➤ From this, it was decided that 3pm to 7pm caters for the majority of the young people.

#### **4. Lessons learned**

- A different consultation method could be chosen to see if it goes as well as this one.
- The questions could be presented on a bigger piece of paper so that people could read them more easily.
- The young people didn't mind answering the open question at the end. Next time, a second question could be added to ensure they have enough space to give their opinions on the consultation.

## Students' involvement in deciding on a new uniform

### Salerno Secondary School, Salthill, Galway

#### 1. How the topic was identified

- Students, staff, parents, management and other members of the school community felt that the uniform no longer represented Salerno as it had become unprofessional, unkempt and tatty looking. In particular, students did not have a sense of pride in their uniform. A consultation process was officially started in January 2015. In September 2015, Salerno offered an official trouser option to students as part of a revised uniform.
- Before 2015, the Salerno school uniform had been a straight-cut check skirt or tracksuit trousers with either a plain wool green jumper or jersey style PE jumper. Shoes were generally runners or fluffy boots, which were in style at the time.
- Most students opted for the tracksuit trousers and PE jumper as it was comfortable and warm. The skirt was unpopular because it was a straight, heavy and unsuitable for a variety of shapes and sizes – “it didn't suit everybody”. Students felt it was unflattering and uncomfortable. However, the tracksuit trousers were generally too long for students and often became ripped and frayed as a result.
- Students communicated to staff that they were comfortable, but they looked unkempt and would often get comments on the school bus about the state of their tracksuits.
- Management also felt it was time for a more streamlined uniform option.

#### 2. The young people's participation in the decision-making

- The key decision-makers in the school are the Principal, Deputy Principal, staff and management.
- Other important decision-makers in this process were the students.
- The main person spearheading the uniform revolution was former Spanish teacher Bridie Higgins. She took on the role of consulting all the members of the school community and liaising with uniform suppliers.

#### 3. How the views of young people were sought, and how they affected the decisions

##### SPACE

- The process of changing the uniform in Salerno stemmed from informal communication with students in class and officially through the student council and prefect system.
- Students were invited to participate by completing a questionnaire about their views on having a school uniform and on the type and style of uniform.
- Bridie distributed a questionnaire to a cross section of students, which included the student council and prefects, asking them:
  - » if they wanted a uniform;
  - » if they would they like an official Salerno jacket;
  - » if they would like a trouser option; and
  - » how they felt about the current options available.
- Bridie also surveyed the parents' council and staff.
- The results showed that a uniform was desired, one that included a trouser option, a more streamlined look and an official school jacket and scarf.

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- Students were involved in testing the fabrics and prototypes for the uniform.
- Once the selection was narrowed-down, prototypes were made and a cross section of students wore them to establish the preferred style and cut by getting the opinions of other students.
- They also tried a variety of coats: a fleece-lined, green waterproof style jacket was the most popular choice.

## VOICE

- There is a strong student voice in Salerno due to the existence of the student council and prefect system. There is also a strong, well-established relationship between teachers and students.
- The council meet either once a week or every second week. The agenda of the meeting is mainly focused on going through suggestion boxes. Suggestion boxes are placed in each year block and students are encouraged to add their ideas, feedback, comments or concerns. These are read out at the council meetings. This process allows students to identify issues they want to address.
- From the initial idea of changing the uniform to its completion, the student voice was an important part of the process.
- Bridie ensured that the student voice was included throughout the process by consulting a cross section of students from different years, and including the student council and the prefects.
- The language used in the questionnaires seeking the students' opinions was clear and age-appropriate.
- Students were given an opportunity to evaluate the uniform options and give feedback on the fabric, style and other features. They were shown sample fabrics and colours to begin with, some plain green and some with a tartan effect.

## AUDIENCE

- Salerno's ethos includes the voice of the student as a priority. Students communicate easily with staff. The official, established lines of interaction between the students, the council and management made communication clear and accessible.
- The Principal (Sister Gerarda Lawler) and Deputy Principal (Ms Marie Flannery) join student council meetings from time to time. This gives the students the opportunity to have their voice heard directly by management. It also shows that their voice is valued and appreciated by management.
- The student council is also invited to meet the Board of Management to inform them of their plans for the year and what they hope to achieve.
- During the consultation processes on the new uniform, Bridie ensured that the student body was the first to be communicated with, as they were the ones that would be directly affected.
- The Principal and management committed to taking the views of students seriously on the uniform issue.

## **INFLUENCE**

- The views of the students were at the heart of the decision to change the uniform. They initiated the change and were consulted at every stage of the process.
- Bridie's surveys covered a wide range of participants – student council, students, staff and parents.
- All of the student feedback was considered and appropriate suggestions implemented. The Principal agreed to an option that was not her own initial preference, but that of the students.
- The result was a tartan skirt with a pleat from the hip down, more wearable than the previous design, and trousers in the same fabric.
- The influence of the views of students is evident in the style, colour and features of the current Salerno uniform. The students have a uniform with which they are comfortable and that gives them a sense of ownership, pride and belonging within the school community.
- Not only did the students decide on the change but they were also fully included in the process. They directly influenced the colour, style and fabric used for the uniform by evaluating the prototypes and giving suggestions. All student suggestions were taken on board, including their request for a zip on the pockets of the trousers to keep personal items safe.

### **4. Lessons learned**

- The uptake of trousers was initially slow but when Kate Middleton was seen wearing a similar style, sales soon started to rise.

### **5. Subsequent developments**

- We are now 5 years down the road, and the uniform continues to look smart. Students feel comfortable on a day-to-day basis (for example while traveling to school, being in class and in study).
- The uniform looks professional and gives the students a sense of belonging.
- The process of communication and change was very well thought-out and implemented: this can help us to plan the involvement of students in future decisions about the school.

## Young people's involvement in implementing the world's first LGBTI+ youth strategy

### The Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth

#### 1. How the topic was identified

The vision guiding the world's first LGBTI+ youth strategy, the LGBTI+ National Youth Strategy 2018–2020 (the Strategy), is underpinned by the Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures National Policy Framework for Children and Young People 2014–2020 (BOBF), and originated within the 2016 Programme for Government for the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY), formerly the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA). The Strategy aims at helping all LGBTI+ young people to be visible, valued and included. The participation and inclusion of young people was central to its development and the implementation of its actions. Young people participated in this process with meaningful purpose, resulting in tangible outcomes.

To ensure young people's centrality in the creation and development of the Strategy, a Youth Advisory Group (YAG) was established in collaboration with BeLonG To and the National Youth Council of Ireland. The YAG provided critical insight into the strategic planning process from the perspective of young people in Ireland. The group consisted of 14 young people who advised on the Strategy's development process on an ongoing basis, with a particular emphasis on youth consultation. Three representatives from the group also sat on the Oversight Committee (established to assist in overseeing the development of the Strategy). In addition to contributing their own views, the YAG also assisted in the planning and delivery of seven youth consultation events held in different locations around the country, the results of which are included, along with the results of a nationwide youth survey, in the *LGBTI+ National Youth Strategy – Report of the Consultations with Young People in Ireland*.

After the creation and development of the Strategy was complete, a decision-making processes regarding its implementation was conducted, in which the contribution of young people was integral. This was facilitated through participation in a Youth Forum.

Following good youth participation practice, the DCEDIY established an interim Youth Advisory Committee to help plan and design a LGBTI+ Youth Forum. The Forum aimed at representing all LGBTI+ young people; individuals with different backgrounds (ethnicities, sexualities, gender identities) were nominated and recruited from across Ireland. The Forum comprised 25 young people (16- to 22-year-olds) who identify as LGBTI+. The Forum first met in September 2019.

The role of the Youth Forum is to support the implementation of particular actions that the DCEDIY is responsible for within the Strategy. (These actions are outlined under Goal 1: Create a safe, supportive and inclusive environment for LGBTI+ young people, Objective 5: Provide a more supportive and inclusive environment that encourages positive LGBTI+ representation and participation in culture, society and sport, and reduces LGBTI+ stigma.) The actions include developing a welcome sticker, a leadership programme and a biennial youth event celebrating young LGBTI+ people. The terms of reference relating to the purpose and responsibilities of the group were agreed by the members at the first meeting of the Forum. The four key elements of the Lundy Model were used in a collective decision-making process to involve the Forum in the implementation of the Strategy.

## 2. The young people's participation in the decision-making

There were a number of decision-makers involved in the implementation of the LGBTI+ National Youth Strategy 2018-2020:

- The DCEDIY and the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs at that time, and the current Minister for Children, Disability, Equality, Integration and Youth
- Other Government Departments and Agencies that engaged with the Strategy
- Young people on the YAG
- Non-governmental Organisations (NGOs).

## 3. How the views of young people were sought, and how they affected the decisions

### SPACE

- Throughout the development and implementation stages, the views of young people were sought as early as possible within the decision-making process. This was achieved by involving young people in the early planning stages of the strategy for the YAG and including them in the recruitment for the Youth Forum, as well as in its formation and implementation. Once the Forum was established, the terms of reference relating to the purpose and responsibilities of the group were agreed by the members (at the first meeting), making sure that young people were consulted on the agenda for decision-making from the beginning.
- Using the support of LGBTI+ organisations, significant efforts were made to represent all LGBTI+ young people; individuals with different backgrounds (ethnicities, sexualities, gender identities) were nominated and recruited from across Ireland for the Youth Forum. This ensured the involvement of young people who are directly affected by the decisions made.
- Young people's involvement was sustained through continuous interactive consultation at Youth Forum meetings in late 2019 and throughout 2020. Facilitators were friendly and welcoming to the young people at the meetings and used icebreaker games aimed at making them feel more comfortable and familiar in meeting spaces. All other attendees were introduced to the young people so the Forum members were aware of who those individuals were and why they were present. Aiming at creating an inclusive atmosphere, name tags with pronouns were used so young people would feel comfortable sharing their pronouns. Due to the unprecedented events of Covid-19 in 2020, the Youth Forum met mostly online in video conferences during this year. Significant efforts were made to ensure that the process was inclusive and accessible by consistently adapting and developing the methods used to appropriately seek the views of young people. Alternative methods for voicing opinions were provided where possible to increase accessibility for all.
- Polls and voting took place to decide the meeting times, dates and lengths. These tools were used to make sure the meetings were more easily accessible to young people.
- Young people were treated with respect: they were provided with agendas for the online meetings in advance, giving them the opportunity to contribute ideas to the meeting plans. Some initiatives were also entirely youth-led, for example a project creating a video submission for a digital pride festival.
- Young people's safety and wellbeing was also respected: information was provided on external support services available to them in an effort to safeguard young people from harm. Those young people who did not attend meetings (without providing an explanation) or who provided lower evaluation scores than usual, were offered the opportunity to link in with facilitators in smaller group meetings or via email to ensure any issues were addressed appropriately. Support was provided where needed.

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- In addition, child safeguarding procedures were put in place and advertised to ensure young people felt safe. Among other things, these procedures related to: parental consent, access to the child safeguarding statement, the appropriate ratio of staff to young people, guidelines for group work in person and online, the logging of attendance at meetings, and the recording of all meetings.

## VOICE

- The role of the Youth Forum and the involvement of young people was set out clearly from the beginning of the consultation process. The Forum also agreed on a clear list of topics where input was needed on specific actions for implementation.
- Subject experts from NGOs and Government Departments and Agencies were invited to attend meetings or supply information, to ensure that young people had the information they needed to generate informed views and meaningfully contribute to decision-making. Documents and accessible explanations were also provided to ensure the information needed to form decisions was available.
- Young people were given time to process information and opportunities to address and contribute to decision-making after meetings. This was facilitated by making online apps available between meetings and by inviting and welcoming email communications from young people.
- Regular planning sessions with decision-makers and adult facilitation staff ensured that the focus of the meetings was on achieving the objectives and contributing to the specific topics and actions originally identified by the Youth Forum.
- Good practice participation methodology for children and young people was employed to ensure that the voices of the young people were heard and recorded accurately. A range of over five online applications were used in different digital meetings to support the inclusion of the voice of young people. All the methods used were open ended and exploratory in order to support unbiased contributions from the youth members as much as possible.
- Young people were encouraged to identify further opportunities for their voices to be heard using different media, for example through the setting up of a Youth Forum Instagram page and supporting the creation of the youth-led Dublin Pride Parade video submission for 2020.
- Young people's experience of sharing their voice was continuously evaluated. Their views on the consultation methodology were also monitored from the start to make sure that they had the opportunity to both voice concerns and also identify the methods that made them feel most comfortable in terms of expressing themselves. Facilitators responded to this feedback to make young people feel comfortable and regularly improved the accessibility of the methods available for providing feedback and inputting views. Alternative methods were also offered wherever possible.
- Young people were informed that their participation was voluntary at the recruitment stage, and reminded verbally at meetings later on. In addition, when the Youth Strategy Term was extended young people were given the opportunity to opt in or opt out of continued participation in the extended period. This was done to highlight the voluntary nature of participation in the Youth Forum.

## AUDIENCE

- Key decision-makers were involved throughout the process; the Department staff directly responsible for decision-making played a central role in planning and attending meetings throughout.
- Other decision-makers attended the meetings to seek the views of the Youth Forum. This gave Forum members an opportunity to contribute to decision-making related to the broader Strategy in addition to the actions identified within the role of the Forum. Forum members were always consulted, and offered meetings with the relevant decision-makers (e.g. the National Library of Ireland, a National Advisory Committee and a representative for LGBTI+ issues on the Oversight Committee for BOBF). If the Forum did not express an interest in meeting with a particular decision-maker this was respected by the DCEDIY.
- Steps were taken to make sure that the young people knew who their views, opinions and feedback were being communicated to. This was communicated to young people verbally. Where possible, team members from the decision-making unit were invited to attend meetings to meet the young people and explain the next steps of the process.
- The DCEDIY showed their commitment to being influenced by young people by returning to seek their views on issues if there were any significant revisions or changes made to plans that they had not been briefed on originally. This ensured that meaningful consultations were held with young people throughout the decision-making process.
- A youth friendly record of the young people's inputs into decision-making was created and distributed by email after every meeting. These emails used accessible language and images and also provided opportunities for young people to follow up on topics and seek further information. Young people could respond by email if they felt that something was missing from these records.
- The decision-makers proved that they were open to listening to feedback from young people by responding directly to evaluations. For example, when the Youth Forum meetings moved online there was feedback from the young people pointing out that the inclusivity regarding pronouns had been partly lost due to the unavailability of name tags. The facilitators and decision-makers responded by changing video conferencing names to include pronouns.
- The adults involved in the core activities of the participation process received in-depth training on good practice in participation and participatory methods for children and young people's input in decision-making.

## INFLUENCE

- Through their participation in the Youth Forum, the members influenced decisions made on the design, look and feel, development and implementation of: a welcome sticker, a celebration event (Live out Loud) and a Leadership Programme (<https://www.gov.ie/en/campaigns/9ecaf-live-out-loud/>).
- Young people identified and implemented their own additional actions and activities. For example, creating a video submission for the Dublin Pride Festival 2020 (<https://www.gov.ie/en/press-release/cf11e-minister-zappone-welcomes-lgbti-youth-forums-participation-in-the-dublin-virtual-pride-parade-young-people-from-the-lgbti-youth-forum-to-contribute-to-the-voices-of-young-people-in-dublin-virtual-pride-parade/>) and a social media presence on Instagram ([https://www.instagram.com/lgbti\\_youth\\_forum/?hl=en](https://www.instagram.com/lgbti_youth_forum/?hl=en)).

- Young people were given both written and verbal reports on what decisions were made and how their views were given due weight within the decision-making process.
- Occasionally there were delays in decisions being made due to unprecedented events related to Covid-19. When this happened, the young people were informed on the progress of the decision-making. The reasons for the delays were explained and new timelines were given to manage the young people's expectations in terms of when decisions would be made.
- Service providers and professionals responsible for aspects of implementation regarding actions that young people had contributed to were invited to meetings. These service providers presented their plans to the Youth Forum for feedback ahead of the actual implementation. Young people were invited to give their views and evaluate whether the service providers, contracted by the decision-makers, were implementing their original vision for the actions.
- Before the young people were asked for their views, the full process of decision-making was explained, including the influence that they could have on the actual decisions. The young people were informed that every effort would be taken to incorporate their feedback but that this may not always be possible due to external factors that also need to be considered by the decision-makers. When it was not possible to implement young people's views exactly, it was clearly explained in meetings and young people were provided with the reasons.
- Young people were provided with evaluation forms after meetings so that they had the opportunity to provide regular feedback. Young people also participated in an externally facilitated workshop that evaluated their participation in the implementation of the Strategy.

#### 4. Lessons learned

- Covid-19 and the transition to online working was a challenge in the implementation of the Youth Forum. Encouraging blue-sky thinking with young people using digital methods of consultation is particularly challenging, especially when operating within tight implementation timelines. Efforts were made to be open regarding questions and methods, however, knowing what we now know, a more open consultative methodology could be explored online.
- More effort is needed to identify if there are accessibility barriers to online participation that could be addressed, particularly the lack of resources that young people may have available to them (e.g. the high costs of phone data, or a lack of devices or suitable spaces to participate from).
- Further development of inclusivity is also needed, in particular mapping pathways for the increased inclusion of young people from different ethnicities.
- Further exploration of the impact of transitioning to the use of online participation methods, for example examining the impact of screen burn-out on attendance, is needed.

## Young people's involvement in improving the experience of living in Ballydowd

### Tusla Ballydowd Special Care Unit

Ballydowd is a special care unit that provides stability in a secured therapeutic environment for young people between the ages of 12 and 17. The objective of the service is to provide young people with an individualised programme of support and therapeutic interventions, which will enable them to return to residential care.

The care provided in Ballydowd assists the young person to develop internal controls, reduce risk-taking behaviour, enhance self-esteem and focus on their strengths. The care also provides the young person with the capacity for constructive choice, resilience and individual responsibility. Ballydowd focuses on achieving the above through building positive relationships with the young person, showing respect and compassion, being attentive to them, and providing recognition and praise for their efforts.

The self-contained campus at Ballydowd currently comprises an administration building, three residential units, a school, indoor recreational facilities and a green area. There are, on average, four or five young people staying in Ballydowd at any given time.

#### 1. How the topics were identified

- Staff in Ballydowd set up and facilitated three committees where the young people came together in a safe and supported space to have their voices heard on how to improve their experience at Ballydowd.
- These committees came about as a result of staff attending Tusla Child and Youth Participation Training, and a desire on behalf of staff and management to increase the level of the young people's participation in Ballydowd and give them greater influence.
- The young people were asked if they wanted to participate in the committees, and expressed an interest in doing so. All the young people in Ballydowd were invited, and could participate in all three committees if they wished.
- The committees were on the topics of the Environment, Activities and Restrictive Practices and met regularly (in agreement with the young people).
- Many different suggestions were put forward directly by the young people to the staff, not only in relation to improving their experience in Ballydowd but also in the context of easing the transition into Ballydowd (which, the young people identified, can be difficult).
- Based directly on the views of young people, the process resulted in 30 restrictive practices being changed and new activities and initiatives being introduced.
- Staff and management have pledged to commit to participation going forward. They will sustain existing processes and develop new ones to ensure they continue to engage with all young people in Ballydowd in order to bring about change.

#### 2. The young people's participation in the decision-making

- The management and staff of Ballydowd were both the audience and the decision-makers.
- The staff who facilitated the committee meetings brought the ideas and suggestions of the young people to the rest of the staff and management for serious consideration and discussion.
- Ideas and suggestions that emerged during daily interactions with staff were also included and considered.
- Staff opinions were sought and the staff and management made decisions as a team on what changes could happen in order to improve the experience for all young people in Ballydowd and to ease the transition for young people into Ballydowd.

- The decisions made were communicated back to the young people verbally along with timelines for implementation when their suggestions had been approved, and explanations and rationales if their suggestions had not been approved.
- Some decisions took longer than others to negotiate due to the complex nature and statutory footing of the service Ballydowd provides or if additional funding was required. The young people were kept updated on the progress of each suggestion.
- Staff and management were available to discuss the proposed changes and their progress with the young people, either individually or collectively, outside the meetings if they wished.

### 3. How the views of young people were sought, and how they affected the decisions

#### SPACE

- Staff facilitated the three committees where the young people came together in a safe and supported space to have their voices heard and to suggest changes that would improve the experience of all young people in Ballydowd.
- Each committee was facilitated by staff who had good relationships with the young people, but their work was supported by all staff and management.
- The committee meetings were held in a communal room chosen by the young people and recently renovated by them; a place they have ownership of and feel comfortable in.
- The tone of the committee meetings was always informal, with snacks, comfortable seating and flexible start and end times.
- All committee meetings were open to all young people at all times.
- This safe and supported space meant the young people were involved in giving their suggestions from the start.

#### VOICE

- Young people were encouraged to identify the issues they wanted to discuss to improve the experience for all young people.
- They could identify issues through the committee meetings: they were asked questions and allowed to make suggestions that could make a difference to their experience of living in Ballydowd.
- During group sessions they were encouraged to put forward any idea or suggestion that could be teased out and discussed.
- The young people could also, if they wished, identify areas for change through their daily interactions with staff and management.
- Most young people preferred to put forward their ideas during discussions at the committee meetings. Those who didn't want to contribute to the group discussions could write down, draw or record their ideas. Creative ways of expression are encouraged at Ballydowd. For example, one young person liked to draw on the walls, so we painted a wall in their bedroom with blackboard paint and encouraged them to express their ideas that way.
- Some young people acted as a representative for the rest of the group if they didn't want to attend a meeting. The young person would consult with the others before the meeting, voice their opinions during it and give them feedback afterwards. This process was facilitated by staff.
- With the arrival of new young people in Ballydowd, more consultations were held, as we believe in the principle of participation as an ongoing process.

## AUDIENCE

- The right decision-makers were involved: the management and staff in Ballydowd.
- Changes to the living arrangements in Ballydowd that were suggested by the young people were brought to management and staff for consideration. The young people were informed of this and given a timeframe for a response.
- Their views were taken seriously as a commitment to the process had been secured from staff and management before the consultations began.
- In addition, management sometimes attended the committee meetings to hear directly from the young people and there is an 'open door' policy in Ballydowd so young people can talk to management directly if they so wish.
- The ideas were discussed at staff meetings and staff opinions were sought. Staff and management agreed to make the requested changes if they were possible.
- Some suggestions were totally novel for Ballydowd and understandably there was a little apprehension in relation to these changes. However, staff and management agreed that ongoing individualised risk assessments would allow the majority of changes to be implemented while also keeping young people and staff safe.

## INFLUENCE

- The collaborative process resulted in approximately 30 restrictive practices being changed and new activities and initiatives being introduced based directly on the views of young people. These included:
  - » the unlocking of internal doors within units;
  - » reduction of nightly checks;
  - » holding own pocket money;
  - » greater number of outings;
  - » unlocking the kitchen during the day;
  - » replacing plastic utensils with 'real' ones;
  - » allowing greater access to Wi-Fi and television;
  - » being involved in menu planning;
  - » introducing new facilities such as a gym, pool table and outdoor furniture;
  - » building a new playground designed by the young people.
- Following consultations with new arrivals to Ballydowd, additional changes implemented by management and staff included:
  - » leaving bedroom doors unlocked at night (if young people want this, some do not);
  - » removing the Perspex screen from in front of the television;
  - » introducing individualised bedtimes;
  - » having internal locks on bedroom doors to give young people privacy (these can be over-ridden in case of an emergency).
- Many of the young people's suggestions on how to make the transition into Ballydowd easier were also supported, approved and implemented. These included:
  - » The creation of an admissions video by young people, to be viewed on arrival instead of booklets, and a new and more welcoming admissions suite in which to view the video.

*continued*

- » One young person explained:  
***“I was in a room for a few days, 101 different people coming into me telling me the same rules over and over and showing me a book. I couldn't take it in. I thought watch a ten-minute video and that would be it. The video will be way better.”***
- » A new admission pack with a welcome letter, food and toiletries put together by the young people.  
***“Little things like munchies, water bottle, toothbrush holder, shower mat, dressing gown. Hot water bottles, teddies, think of all the age groups, not just the older kids.”***
- » A readymade pre-admission bedroom, which the young person can individualise with their assigned budget when they feel ready.

## 5. Subsequent developments

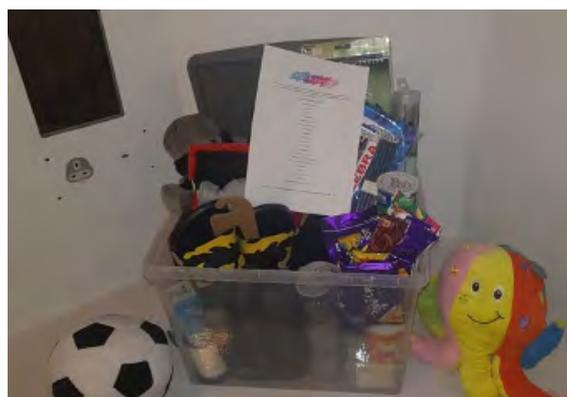
- To date, the feedback about the changes has been positive from all young people, both those directly involved in the engagement and those who were not.

***“More freedom in the place than there was before. We are allowed hold pocket money ourselves now.”***

***“We weren't allowed make our own food before going to bed. Now the doors are left open and we can go into the kitchen. We were not allowed glasses, cutlery. We had to have plastic cups, knives and forks, plates. Now we have real cups.”***

***“We can lock our door from the inside. We only got the locks since Christmas. We are more independent. Staff have a key to over-ride the lock but they would only use it in case of emergency.”***

***“Staff are always asking our opinions. They listen to us.”***



*The new admission suite and the admission packs designed by the young people*

## A child's experience of being listened to by a vet

### This story is narrated by an 11-year old girl

One Wednesday evening my Dad was out walking my dog. I was at my friend's house. She only lives a few doors down. My mum came to the door and said something bad happened and she told me my dog Milo got knocked down by a car. I came home and Milo was on the floor he had a big bump on his head and his back legs weren't working. We rushed to UCD vet.

When we got there, he was taken into the surgery. They did all the tests with him while me, my Mum and my Dad waited in a waiting room. A vet called Sinéad came out and said to go wait in the car and they would ring us.

We were quite a long time waiting for a call from Sinéad. She told us that he had a very serious head injury, and that he might not survive. She said that we could keep him on medicine til the morning and run some tests then or put him down.

She brought us to a quiet room where we could make a decision. We had as much time as we needed. We went in to see him. The vet asked me what I would like to do. I could see how much pain he was in so I had to let him go. She explained to me what would happen if he was put down. He would get an injection to put him to sleep and he would not be in pain anymore. She asked me if I wanted to stay with him when he got the injection or wait outside with my Mum. I wanted to wait outside.

She let me say goodbye and asked me if I wanted some of his fur. I said yes and she put it in a plastic ziplock bag for me. She put a blanket over Milo so he would not be cold. She gave me a sheet of different boxes for the ashes, I picked out one that you could put a photo in. Here is the photo I put in. Because of how nice the vet was to me I decided that I want to be a vet when I'm older.



### How the vet ensured that the child was given Space, Voice, Audience and Influence?

#### SPACE

- The child felt safe to express her views because she was brought to a quiet room with her parents.
- The vet give the child as much time as she needed to be sad and to talk.
- The vet helped the child feel safe by sharing her own (the vet's) family's experience of losing a pet.

### VOICE

- The vet told the child that she could choose what would happen to the dog and that the final decision would be hers.
- The vet explained that the child had choices, but was honest with the child that the dog would not be able to walk and would not be lively if she chose to let him live.
- The child was able to ask questions that mattered to her.
- The child was able to make a decision about what was best for the dog.

### AUDIENCE

- The vet's body language and use of eye contact made it clear that she was ready and willing to listen to the child.
- The vet explained that the child had choices, but was honest about what she would do in a similar situation.
- The vet made it clear that she would act on the child's views.

### INFLUENCE

- The vet told the child that the final decision would be hers and that her views would be acted on.
- The vet explained how the dog would be given the injection and what would happen after the injection.
- The vet offered the child the opportunity to be with the dog and say goodbye both before the injection and after the injection.
- The child was able to be central to the final decision and to see the impact of her views on the decision to let the dog go.

