

***A report on the involvement of children and young people
in the recruitment of the Ombudsman for Children***

October 2015

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This report should be cited as follows:

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

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Executive summary

This report examines the involvement of children and young people in the process of recruiting the Ombudsman for Children. It presents the findings of consultations conducted with key stakeholders involved in the process, including the children and young people, their parents and guardians, the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, staff members from the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA) and the Public Appointments Service (PAS), members of the interview panel and candidates for the post of Ombudsman for Children.

The report looks at the background and rationale for children and young people's participation in the recruitment of the Ombudsman for Children; the development of a process and consultation methodology; how children and young people were recruited to take part; the consultation methodologies, preparation and involvement of children and young people in the interview process; and strengths, limitations and impacts of the process.

The right of children and young people to participate in decisions that affect their lives is set out in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1989) and reflected in national policies such as *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures: The National Policy Framework for Children & Young People, 2014-2020* and the *National Strategy on Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-making 2015-2020*. The benefits of the participation of children and young people in decision-making are wide-ranging, and include benefits for children and young people themselves as well as the wider society.

Children and young people were recruited for the consultation process with the assistance of the Irish Primary Principals Network, Comhairle na nÓg, Exchange House Traveller Centre, the Irish Wheelchair Association and Empowering People in Care (EPIC). In identifying the children and young people for consultation workshops, attention was paid to ensuring a gender, race, ability and socio-economic mix, with a particular focus on seldom-heard children and young people.

Two consultations sessions were conducted, one with primary school children and one with older young people, using age-appropriate methodologies, to seek the views of children and young people on the ideal qualities for the person specification for the Ombudsman for Children. The consultations were designed and conducted by the Citizen Participation Unit of DCYA. At the consultations, information was provided to the children and young people by personnel from the PAS, the Office of the Ombudsman and the Office of the Ombudsman for Children. A smaller group of children and young people volunteered, or were selected, at the consultations to take part in the next stage of the interview process, and two young people from this group were selected by their peers to be included on the adult interview panel.

Key strengths of the process identified included the participation of children and young people in the recruitment decision-making process; the unique insight that children and young people brought to the process; the age appropriateness of the process; the diversity of children and young people involved; and the methodologies used. Limitations included those related to the rationale for including children and young people in the process, and others related to the consultation days, role plays and the involvement of young people in an adult interview panel. A number of impacts of the process were also identified, including personal, family, community and societal impacts.

Overall, the involvement of children and young people in the recruitment of the Ombudsman for Children was viewed positively by the majority of key stakeholders involved in the process. In general, children and young people were given safe, inclusive opportunities to form and express their views; they were very well facilitated to express their views throughout the process using age-appropriate methodologies, and their views were listened to and were acted on appropriately. Suggested improvements to the process include conducting interviews in a less formal and more child- and youth-friendly environment and providing more visibility, detailed information and feedback to children and young people on the scoring and decision-making process.

Introduction

This report examines the involvement of children and young people in the recruitment of the Ombudsman for Children and details the findings of consultations carried out with key stakeholders involved in the process.

Background

In September 2014, Dr James Reilly TD, Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, approved the engagement of the Public Appointments Service (PAS) to recruit a new Ombudsman for Children. The recruitment process featured the involvement of children and young people at all stages. The Citizen Participation Unit of the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA) was assigned responsibility for appropriately involving children and young people in the recruitment process. DCYA partnered with key personnel in the PAS in this project.

About the Ombudsman for Children

The role of the Ombudsman for Children is to promote and safeguard the rights and welfare of children and young people up to 18 years of age, and to investigate complaints made by children and young people, or by adults on their behalf, about most types of schools and hospitals along with Government departments and certain public bodies (www.oco.ie).

About DCYA and the Citizen Participation Unit

DCYA focuses on harmonising policy issues that affect children in areas such as early childhood care and education, youth justice, child welfare and protection, children and young people's participation, research on children and young people, youth work and cross-cutting initiatives for children. DCYA has a dedicated Citizen Participation Unit, the role of which is to ensure that children and young people have a voice in the design, delivery and monitoring of services and policies that affect their lives, at national and local level. It collaborates in this endeavour with other Government departments, statutory bodies and non-governmental organisations. DCYA completed development of the first *National Strategy on Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-making (2015-2020)*, which was published in June 2015. Ireland is the first country in Europe to have such a strategy.

The work of the DCYA Citizen Participation Unit is guided by Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), and is directed by the belief that children and young people are the citizens of today and not just the adults of tomorrow. Its work is undertaken through the development of effective structures for children's participation in decision-making, conducting consultations and dialogues with children and young people, and the development of evidence-based policy in keeping with national and international best practice. DCYA is committed to ensuring the inclusion of seldom-heard children and young people in participation structures and initiatives.

About the Public Appointments Service

The Public Appointments Service is the centralised provider of recruitment, assessment and selection services for the Civil Service in Ireland (www.publicjobs.ie).

Key stages in the process

There were four key stages in the process, as follows:

- **Stage 1:** Development of a methodology for involving children and young people in the appointment of the Ombudsman for Children (August–September 2014)
- **Stage 2:** Recruitment of children and young people for consultations on the ideal qualities for the person specification for the post of Ombudsman for Children (September 2014)
- **Stage 3:** Consultations with children and young people on the ideal qualities for the person specification for the post of Ombudsman for Children (October 2014)
- **Stage 4:** Preparation of the panel of children and young people for conducting role plays and interviewing candidates for the post of Ombudsman for Children (November 2014–December 2015, January 2015)

Data collection methods

The data collection methods used for this study were: 1) a review of documentation relating to the planning of the consultation methodologies and process; 2) interviews and focus groups with the following key stakeholders involved in the process:

- Staff from DCYA and the Participation Support Team
- Staff from the Public Appointments Service (PAS)
- The Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, Dr James Reilly TD
- The 13 children and young people involved in the recruitment of the Ombudsman for Children
- Parents or guardians of the children and young people involved in the recruitment process
- Two candidates shortlisted for the post of Ombudsman for Children
- Two adult members of the interview panel.

Ethical considerations

Consideration was given to ethical issues arising at every stage of the research process. However, the main ethical issues to be addressed in this research were:

- **Child protection and well-being:** Research was conducted in accordance with *Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children*, (DCYA, 2011).
- **Informed consent:** Informed consent was obtained and all necessary steps were taken to ensure that participants were given adequate information on the purpose and use of the data being collected.
- **Informed assent:** Each child and young person was informed about the research and invited to participate, and it was explained that they were free to withdraw from the process at any stage without explanation.
- **Confidentiality:** Research data that included identifiable information on participants were not disclosed to others. Limited personal data were collected and these data were not used for any purpose other than that specified at the time of the collection.

- **Anonymisation:** At the earliest possible stage, data were anonymised and all research outputs were checked carefully to ensure that no individual was identifiable.
- **Record-keeping, including data protection and security:** All appropriate steps were taken to ensure that data were held in a secure way including, for example, the removal of direct identifiers, the use of pseudonyms, where appropriate, and the use of technical means to break the link between data and identifiable individuals.

Data analysis

Focus groups and interviews were recorded digitally, transcribed and data were then coded before a thematic analysis was undertaken in which key themes arising were identified.

Report structure

This report is divided into the following sections:

- **Section 1** examines the background and rationale for involving children and young people in the recruitment of the Ombudsman for Children.
- **Section 2** examines the development of a process and consultation methodology for involving children and young people in the recruitment process.
- **Section 3** examines the recruitment of children and young people for consultations on the ideal qualities for the person specification for the post of Ombudsman for Children.
- **Section 4** examines the consultations undertaken with children and young people as part of the recruitment process.
- **Section 5** examines the preparation and involvement of children and young people in conducting role plays and interviewing candidates for the post.
- **Section 6** provides an analysis of the strengths, limitations and impacts of the process of involving children and young people in the recruitment of the Ombudsman for Children. It also assesses the process against Lundy's Model of Participation, and provides conclusions and recommendations.

Section 1: Background and rationale

1.1 Overview

This section examines the background and rationale for involving children and young people in the recruitment of the Ombudsman for Children.

1.2 Background

The National Children's Strategy Our Children — Their Lives, which was published in 2000, called for the establishment of the Office of the Ombudsman for Children. The Office was established under the Ombudsman for Children Act, 2002. This Act details the responsibilities, duties and powers of the Ombudsman for Children.

The main functions of the Office of the Ombudsman for Children are:

- to promote the welfare and rights of children generally (as listed in the UNCRC)
- to investigate complaints from children on issues that affect them
- to consult with children on issues of importance to them
- to advise Government on issues of importance to children.

Emily Logan became Ireland's first Ombudsman for Children in March 2004 and served in the post until 2014. In September 2014, Dr James Reilly TD, Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, approved the engagement of the PAS to recruit a new Ombudsman for Children. Children and young people were involved in the recruitment process for the first Ombudsman for Children and the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, Dr James Reilly TD, considered it important to also include children and young people in this recruitment process:

"I was hugely positive of children's voices being heard in the process and we would be hugely supportive of that because that is what the Department is all about. I thought it was an excellent process. The Department refined the process from the last time it was done in 2003 and the approach in Northern Ireland heavily informed it. I thought it was a great idea and it sends a very loud and important message to

children that this Department is not just a window dressing and we want to hear their voices.” (Minister for Children and Youth Affairs)

1.3 Background and rationale for children and young people’s participation in decision-making

In 1992 Ireland ratified the UNCRC, which guaranteed a commitment to ensuring that the voices of children and young people are heard and their opinions are given due weight in matters that affect them. Goal 1 of *Our Children – Their Lives: The National Children’s Strategy* states that ‘*children will have a voice in matters which affect them and their views will be given due weight in accordance with their age and maturity*’, drawing strongly on Article 12 of the UNCRC.

Listening to the voices of children and young people is also central to the vision of *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures: The National Policy Framework for Children and Young People, 2014-2020*, published in 2014. It states:

‘Our vision is for Ireland to be one of the best small countries in which to grow up and to raise a family and where the rights of all children and young people are respected, protected and fulfilled; where their voices are heard and where they are supported to realise their maximum potential now and in the future.’

Similarly, the first *National Strategy on Children and Young People’s Participation in Decision-making (2015-2020)*, published in June 2015, is guided and influenced by the UNCRC and the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights. Its goal is to ensure that children and young people will have a voice in their individual and collective everyday lives.

In terms of rationale, DCYA (2015a:7) outlines the benefits of participation by children and young people in decision-making across a wide range of areas including improved services; policies; research; active citizenship; improvements for children themselves, such as increased self-confidence and communication skills and better educational outcomes; and improvements for society such as supporting active citizenship and social inclusion.

1.4 Definition and models of children and young people's participation in decision-making

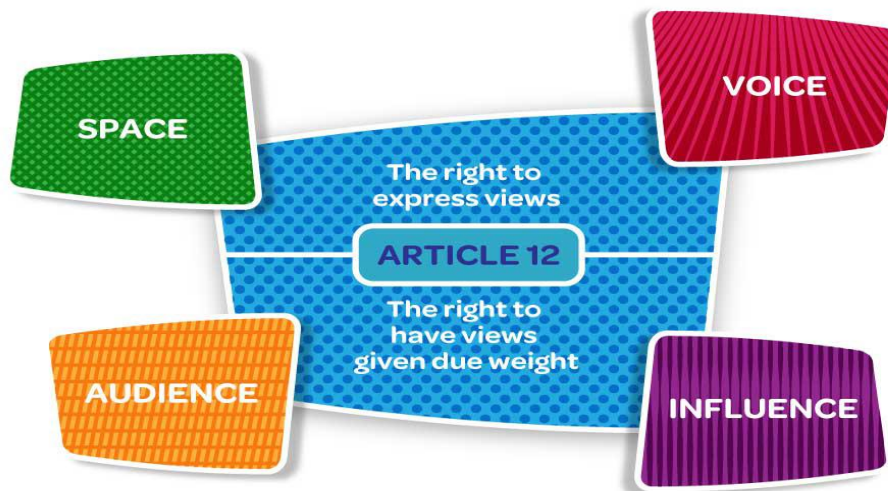
The *National Strategy on Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-making* (DCYA, 2015a:20) defines children and young people's participation in decision-making as *'the process by which children and young people have active involvement and real influence in decision-making on matters affecting their lives, both directly and indirectly.'*

There are several models of participation, including Hart's Ladder of Citizen Participation (Arnstein, 1969), Treseder's (1997) Degrees of Participation; Shier's (2001) Pathways to Participation; Kirby *et al's* (2003) Model of Participation; and Lundy's (2007) Model of Participation.

The *National Strategy on Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-making* (DCYA, 2015a) is underpinned by Lundy's (2007) Model of Participation (see Figure 1), which is grounded in the UNCRC and focused on a rights-based approach to involving children in decision-making. Lundy's Model of Participation calls for the consideration of four key elements: **space** (children must be given the opportunity to express a view); **voice** (children must be facilitated to express their view); **audience** (the view must be listened to) and **influence** (the view must be acted upon, as appropriate).

Lundy's Voice Model Checklist for Participation was also developed as part of the *National Strategy on Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-making*. The purpose of the checklist is to help organisations, working with and for children and young people, to comply with Article 12 of the UNCRC and ensure that children have the space to express their views; their voice is enabled; they have an audience for their views; and their views will have influence. The process of involving children and young people in the appointment of the Ombudsman for Children will be evaluated against the effective use of this model later in the report.

Figure 1: Lundy's Model of Participation



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

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

1.5 Stakeholders' views on rationale

Key stakeholders involved in the process were asked what they thought of the idea of involving children and young people in the recruitment of the Ombudsman for Children. All parties involved in the process agreed with the rationale for involving children and young people in the recruitment process. However, the rationale was questioned by one shortlisted candidate.

1.6 Children and young people's views on rationale

All of the 13 children and young people involved in the process thought it was a really good idea to include children and young people in the recruitment process. They felt it made sense to have children and young people involved in selecting the Ombudsman for Children because the role involves dealing with children and young people, and promoting their rights. They also thought it was fair that children and young people's voices were heard in the recruitment process:

- *“I think it’s a good idea. It’s only fair that children have a say in the recruitment of the Ombudsman for Children.”* (Young person)
- *“I thought it was very good that they didn’t just get the adults to pick the Ombudsman for Children. Children have to have a view as well the adults.”* (Child)

Children and young people considered their involvement to be very important as they are the ‘experts’ on what it is like to be a child or a young person. They felt that adults would not have the unique perspective that they have on children and young people’s issues.

- *“I think it is a very good idea because who knows better about being children and young people than children and young people.”* (Young person)

In addition, they felt that the ability of an Ombudsman for Children to be able to relate to, communicate and work with children and young people was essential, and this was something that could only be judged by children and young people themselves. Finally, some children and young people thought the role play scenarios were a good preparation for candidates for the post of Ombudsman for Children, as they would have to deal with similar situations if they were appointed to the position.

- *“A lot of adults might pick people that patronise children and that could be very annoying for children.”* (Child)
- *“It was a good experience because if they (the candidates) got the job they would have to put up with children shooting questions at them.”* (Child)

1.7 Candidates’ views on rationale

One of the two candidates interviewed for the report agreed wholeheartedly with the idea of including children and young people in the recruitment of the Ombudsman for Children, and thought that not including them would be a step backwards in terms of children and young people’s participation.

- *“I was delighted with it. I was fascinated with how the last Ombudsman for Children was selected. Any other step would have been backwards.”* (Candidate)

However, the other candidate strongly questioned the rationale for involving children and young people in the process. They drew a comparison with the appointment of other Ombudsmen and highlighted the fact that target audiences are not included in these recruitment processes. For example, pensioners are not included in the recruitment of the Pensions Ombudsman, or members of the public in the recruitment of The Ombudsman.

- *“I still have questions over how and why children are involved in the recruitment. We don’t involve pensioners in the Pensions Ombudsman. We have to be careful about the rigour of this. The Ombudsman for Children has to effect change for children, and obviously they have to have a good rapport, but we need to be careful not to be disingenuous about involving children because it looks good.”* (Candidate)

The candidate was unclear about the rationale for involving children and young people in the process and questioned whether it was done just because “it looks good” or “makes us all feel good.” While they thought the children and young people involved in the process were “brilliant” and took their roles very seriously, the candidate questioned whether their involvement was tokenistic.

- *“I wonder is it tokenistic and it makes us all feel good. I would encourage children to have voices, but we have to be careful about why we are doing it. I do want to say the children were brilliant and they worked really hard in the role, but my issue is just with the principle.”* (Candidate)

The criticism of the rationale for involving children and young people in the recruitment of the Ombudsman for Children could, perhaps, be judged as a criticism of how other Ombudsmen, whose target audience is not involved in the recruitment process, are recruited. It could be argued, however, that as the target audience of the Ombudsman for Pensions is adults they are, in fact, included in the recruitment process whereas children,

the target audience of the Ombudsman for Children, are not usually involved in recruitment processes.

1.8 Public Appointments Service (PAS) views on rationale

Some of these criticisms relating to the rationale for including children and young people in the recruitment process were addressed by staff members from the PAS as part of this consultation. They identified the involvement of key stakeholders, impacted by a post, in the recruitment process as best practice. In addition, the role plays that candidates conducted with children and young people were deemed to be a good predictor of the future performance of candidates. Furthermore, they highlighted the fact that children and young people were included in their capacity as children and young people, and were not asked to judge candidates on issues other than their communication skills with this audience.

- *“I think it is invaluable to involve the key stakeholders. In principle, if you can include the people impacted by the post it is really worthwhile. It was a bit daunting, but added hugely to the process. We can stand over that this person was assessed by children and they (children and young people) were happy with it.”*

[PAS staff member]

- *“We (PAS staff member) are psychologists, and if you are looking to predict performance methods, like having the children involved means you have a more holistic view. Children bring a unique insight. A candidate might say, ‘I am brilliant with children,’ but with this process you can see it.”* [PAS staff member]

- *“There was a bit of ‘why we don’t involve pensioners for the Ombudsman for Pensions?’ Feedback in the main, the candidates saw it as positive, but there were a few candidates who did question how capable children were at making an assessment and how appropriate it was to involve children and young people in the process. We were clear about asking them to engage as children, and the function of the role play was around communication. We weren’t asking to make a decision on strategic issues for the role, but can they communicate effectively?”*

[PAS staff member]

Section 2: Development of a process and consultation methodology

2.1 Overview

This section documents the development of a process and consultation methodology for involving children and young people in the recruitment of the Ombudsman for Children.

2.2 Development of the process

In order to develop a process for involving children and young people in the recruitment of the Ombudsman for Children, the DCYA Citizen Participation Unit undertook a review of the process adopted for involving children and young people in the recruitment of Ireland's first Ombudsman for Children in Ireland in 2003, and of the process adopted in Northern Ireland for the recruitment of a Commissioner for Children in 2014. (See Section 2.3 below for detailed comparison).

The DCYA Citizen Participation Unit was mindful that the approach to be used in involving children and young people in the process should be strengths-based and be respectful of candidates, and of children and young people. Some processes that were examined were considered to be very long and demanding, requiring children to have wide knowledge, experience and training in areas such as recruitment, interviews and children's rights. It was felt that involving children in their capacity as children was fairer and more appropriate.

"We needed to be careful about the approach we adopted, and the approach needed to respect the candidates as well as respect the children. It needed to come from the perspective of children as children... We didn't want children to go beyond their own capacities, or training them, or expect them to make up role plays not based on their own experiences. It was a strengths-based approach based on children being children." (DCYA staff member)

2.3 Comparison with the Commissioner for Children approach in Northern Ireland

The approach adopted in Northern Ireland in relation to involving children and young people in the recruitment of the Commissioner for Children was similar to that adopted for the Ombudsman for Children. These similarities, and the differences between the processes, are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Similarities and differences in the recruitment processes for the Ombudsman for Children and the Commissioner for Children

Similarities between processes	Differences between processes	
	Commissioner for Children recruitment process	Ombudsman for Children recruitment process
Temporary panels established for the sole purpose of a single appointment	Involved children over 12 years of age only	Included children aged 8-18 years
Appropriate gender, race, ability and socio-economic mix of panel members achieved	Participants required to have previous experience of being involved in a recruitment process	No previous experience of a recruitment process necessary
Panels were recruited through child and youth organisations (and schools in the case of the Ombudsman process)	Participants needed to have received training in interviewing skills in the previous 1-2 years	No previous training in interviewing required or given
Panels were involved in the development of person specifications for the respective roles	Good communication skills a requirement for participants	Level of communication skill not specified
Both panels conducted role plays with candidates, and two young people were included on an adult interview panel	A knowledge of children's rights was a requirement for participants	Knowledge of children's rights was not a requirement for participants

According to Kirby and Bryson (2002), specific conditions such as requirements and complexity within a participatory project can act as a barrier to participation for children and young people. The inclusion of younger children in the recruitment of the Ombudsman for Children reflects the acknowledgment that young children are experts in their own lives

and are also skilled in communicating a unique insight in terms of their own experiences and perspectives (Lansdown, 2005; Kjørholt, 2002). It also corresponds with the first principle of participation set out in the *National Strategy on Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-making*, which states '*there is no age limit on the right of the child to express her or his views freely.*'

Similarly, other principles of participation (DCYA, 2015a) reflected in the process adopted for the appointment of the Ombudsman for Children included the right of children and young people to participate without discrimination on any grounds; consideration of the evolving capacities of children and young people; participation of children and young people with fewer opportunities; providing children and young people with all relevant information and support; and participation as an on-going process.

Overall, the approach adopted for the recruitment of the Ombudsman for Children was more inclusive, as well as being child- and youth- friendly. Including younger children in the recruitment process was very valuable and ensured that the opinions and experiences of this group of children influenced the appointment. As the Ombudsman for Children acts on behalf of children and young people of all ages, it was appropriate that children and young people from a wide range of ages were involved in the process.

The eligibility criteria that children and young people had to meet in order to take part in the recruitment process for the Commissioner for Children, in terms of expertise, knowledge and skill levels in areas such as communication and interviewing, was undoubtedly a barrier to participation for many. The lack of such criteria and requirements for children and young people's involvement in the recruitment of the Ombudsman for Children ensured a more inclusive, child-friendly approach. Children and young people were judged as experts in their own right, as children and young people, and each of them brought their unique experiences and perspectives to the recruitment process, which added greatly to the overall process.

2.4 Proposed approach

A proposed approach was put forward to the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs and the Secretary General of DCYA and was approved. The proposed approach is detailed below:

- A best practice and cost-effective process for involving children and young people in the recruitment process
- Initial consultations with approximately 70 children and young people
- Separate consultation/workshop sessions for younger children (7-12 years) and older children (13-17 years)
- Ensuring a good gender, race, ability and socio-economic mix, with a particular focus on seldom-heard children
- Designing a clear and focused objective for the consultations/workshops with age-appropriate methodologies
- Children and young people themselves should select a smaller group of approximately five children and five young people to be directly involved in the recruitment process
- Exploring the most meaningful mechanism for involvement of the children and young people in the recruitment process.

All stages of the process of involving children and young people in this project were also negotiated and agreed with personnel from the PAS.

2.5 Development of the consultation methodology

Once the proposed approach was agreed, the DCYA Citizen Participation Unit began designing and planning the methodologies to be used for involving children and young people in the recruitment of the Ombudsman for Children. The two main methods used for the consultations were a 'body map' and a 'wall of ideas.' A body map involves one person lying on a giant piece of paper and getting another volunteer to draw all around them. Children and young people can then write down words or ideas on different parts of the body map, which can generate discussion in an informal way. Body maps are good tools to

find out how children and young people feel about something; they provide an informal workshop setting, i.e. working on the floor, and are suitable for varying literacy levels as children and young people can tell facilitators their views which they, in turn, can write on the body map (DCYA, 2015b:100–101).

A ‘wall of ideas’ or ‘graffiti wall’ allows children and young people to respond to a question, i.e. ‘What type of person should an Ombudsman for Children be?’ in their own way through doodling, drawing or writing on a ‘wall.’ This method works well over a long period of time as it gives children and young people the opportunity to come and go to express ideas as they come to them, for example over the course of a day (DCYA, 2015b:94).

2.6 Consultation sessions

Two consultations sessions were designed, one for primary-school-age children and one for secondary-school-age young people, using age-appropriate methodologies to seek the views of children and young people on the ideal qualities for the person specification for the Ombudsman for Children to be included in the advertisement for the post. Methodologies used at the consultation events included a ‘wall of ideas’ (see Figures 2 and 3) where children and young people could write down what type of person the Ombudsman for Children should be, and a ‘body map exercise’ where children and young people were asked to write down the top qualities of an Ombudsman for Children and then voted on them.

2.7 Presentations

At the consultations, presentations were made by personnel from the PAS, the Office of the Ombudsman and the Office of the Ombudsman for Children. The presentations provided information to children and young people on the role of the PAS, the role of an Ombudsman, the role of the Ombudsman for Children, and an overview of the input they would have into the recruitment process, e.g. conducting role plays with candidates, and the inclusion of two young people on the adult interview panel for a presentation by candidates.

2.8 Selection of a panel of children and young people

At the end of the consultation events, children and young people were asked to volunteer for involvement in the next phase. A selection process was then conducted by adults to choose 13 children and young people to take part in the next stage of the recruitment process. Their remit was to ensure that a mix of children and young people, in terms of age, gender, background, ability, experience and capacity, were included in the panel of 13.

Section 3: Recruitment of children and young people

3.1 Overview

This section looks at the recruitment of children and young people for consultations on the ideal qualities for the person specification for the post of Ombudsman for Children.

3.2 How children and young people were recruited

In identifying the children and young people for consultation workshops, DCYA was mindful of ensuring a gender, race, ability and socio-economic mix, with a particular focus on seldom-heard children and young people. As Minister Reilly stated:

- *“We spent quite a bit of time to ensure there was a wide range of young people across ages, social status and ethnicity and I think it was critically important. It is sending a message to the children other than the process that these things are important.”* (Minister for Children and Youth Affairs)

In order to assist in selecting children for the consultation process, DCYA sought information from the Office of the Ombudsman for Children on the key issues emerging from complaints, investigations and other communications with children and families. This process enabled DCYA to ensure that children affected by these issues were included in the consultation process.

Children and young people were recruited for the consultation process with the assistance of the Irish Primary Principals Network, Comhairle na nÓg, Exchange House Traveller Centre, the Irish Wheelchair Association (IWA) and Empowering People in Care (EPIC).

- *“We (DCYA) asked the Office of the Ombudsman for Children to give us the topics of complaints and engagement with the office over the last ten years and by far the biggest number of complaints was around education, then health and then other issues. We selected government organisations that work with those children, such as*

IWA and Exchange House Traveller Centre, and we made sure there was a mix of young people affected by those issues.” (DCYA staff member)

Young people who were recruited through Comhairle na nÓg¹ were informed of the key issues relating to complaints, investigations and communications to the Ombudsman for Children and asked to put themselves forward if they had direct or indirect experience of these issues. According to DCYA, this approach worked well, was very effective, resulted in the recruitment of a wide mix of young people from different backgrounds, promoted reflection and understanding of the issues, improved the authenticity of the role plays and improved the quality of the process.

- *“I thought it was a really interesting approach and we (DCYA) have never done it this way before and it was very effective and it improved the quality of the process.” (DCYA staff member)*
- *“The email (to Comhairle na nÓg) said ‘if you know anyone who has experience of bullying, learning disabilities,’ and you had to have an understanding of those issues. It really came through in the role plays, like one girl had a role play about two girls in her school who are Roma who were being bullied, so she really got it.” (DCYA staff member)*

3.3 Children and young people’s views on their involvement

All of the children and young people involved were very happy to be selected to take part in the consultation and recruitment process. They saw it as an interesting, unique and important opportunity. Children and young people described the opportunity and responsibility of being involved in the process as “a big deal”, “a pretty big privilege” and “a once-in-a-lifetime experience”. Some viewed it as a chance for children and young people to have their voices heard.

¹ Comhairle na nÓg are local councils for children and young people, aged 12-17 years, that give them a voice on the development of local policies and services.

- *“I thought it would be an interesting experience and a once-in-a-lifetime experience...I thought it was a really good opportunity to have my voice heard.”*
(Young person)
- *“I just wanted to take part and learn more stuff about the Ombudsman for Children.”*
(Child)
- *“I was delighted to get involved. It is kind of a big deal. It was really good to have an insight on who was being picked and make sure the right person was picked.”* (Young person)

A number of younger children, who generally had not heard of the Ombudsman for Children, were surprised that they were selected to take part in the recruitment process. Others found it surprising that younger children were included.

- *“I didn’t really know what it was at the start and I was surprised because no one knew anything about it before. The principal told me about it after.”* (Child)
- *“When the principal told me I almost had a heart attack!”* (Child)
- *“It was a pretty big privilege. When I heard at first that we were going to be on the panel and in the role plays it was quite shocking because I never heard of anything like that happening before and younger children being involved as well and how responsible they were was unreal.”* (Young person)

3.4 Parents’ and guardians’ views on children and young people’s involvement

The parents and guardians of the 13 children and young people were very proud of their children’s involvement in the process and were happy with the way the process was conducted.

- *“I was very proud of him (son) and it was great for them.”* (Parent)

- *“It was great for us (parents) and everyone. The relations and grannies are all so proud and make a lot of it and tell their neighbours and every time they meet him they ask him about it.”* (Parent)
- *“It’s hard to see any faults with this process.”* (Parent)

Parents and guardians thought it was very important that children and young people from a mix of different backgrounds were included in the process. The father of one young person who is from the Traveller community thought his child’s involvement was very positive and created a role model for other young Travellers.

- *“There was a great mix of young people and they all got on really well and I thought it was really well done. There was a great selection of kids.”* (Parent)
- *“Definitely they had a good mix of young people and he is coming from the Traveller community. He was a good role model and his friends all thought it was great.”* (Parent)

Many of the parents and guardians noticed an increase in their child’s self-confidence as a result of taking part in the process. They felt this was primarily due to being picked from a larger group of children and young people to participate on the smaller panel. Principals, teachers, fellow pupils, family and friends also showed a huge interest in their involvement, which made them feel important. For some children and young people, being part of a group really improved their self-confidence.

- *“My daughter had just moved schools and it was a big move for her and she was getting a rough time in school. She really had her confidence down and then she got picked for this and it was fantastic, and she went back to her old school and they put it in the newsletter that she was involved in it, and everyone was asked how she was getting on. So, for her and her confidence it was really good.”* (Parent)

- *“For him being part of a group, because of his disability he can get down, and it was really important for him and all his friends were asking him about it.”* (Parent)

Parents and guardians spoke about their children having a sense of ownership of the process due to their involvement. In addition, they talked about their children being more aware of their rights and more interested in politics and current affairs since participating in the recruitment process. In addition, many of the parents, guardians, children and young people were unaware of the Ombudsman for Children, and felt it was important that they and their children now knew where to go if they had a complaint.

- *“There was a great sense of ownership and giving back to the kids. I think it gave them more confidence and it gave them an awareness that the Ombudsman for Children is looking out for them and is there.”* (Parent)
- *“It came on the news who got the job and there was pure excitement and they said, ‘that’s the guy we picked!’ They were absolutely delighted.”* (Parent)
- *“She is very interested and wants eventually to get into politics. I find that an odd time at home now she would quote me her rights.”* (Parent)

The parents and guardians thought their children took the process very seriously. For example, they all adhered to the confidentiality aspect of the process.

- *“He took it very seriously. He carried out the confidentiality clause to the letter of the law and we respected that and we encouraged him to take it seriously. He didn’t even bring up the conversation.”* (Parent)

Section 4: Consultations with children and young people

4.1 Overview

This section examines the consultations undertaken with children and young people as part of the recruitment process.

4.2 About the consultation sessions

Two consultation sessions were held with children and young people on the ideal qualities for the person specification for the post of Ombudsman for Children. Thirty-six children aged 8-12 years took part in a consultation workshop on Monday, 20 October 2014 and 40 young people aged 13-17 years took part in a consultation workshop on Tuesday, 21 October 2014. The Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, Dr James Reilly, TD attended both consultation events:

- *“I thought it was important to be at both days and send a message to them (children and young people) that we are serious about this and serious about what they had to say...I enjoyed the day. It was great fun. They (children and young people) had an energy and a buzz and an enthusiasm.”* (Minister for Children and Youth Affairs)

4.3 Presentations

At the consultations, children and young people were given information on the role of the Ombudsman for Children through presentations by personnel from the PAS, the Office of the Ombudsman and the Office of the Ombudsman for Children.

4.4 Consultation methodologies

The consultations were designed and conducted by the DCYA Citizen Participation Unit. Methodologies used included a ‘wall of ideas’ where children and young people could write down what type of person the Ombudsman for Children should be, and a ‘body map exercise’ where children and young people in smaller groups were asked to write down the top qualities an Ombudsman for Children should have on large pieces of paper in the shape of a body.

This was followed by a discussion on the ‘must have’ and ‘nice if’ qualities of an Ombudsman for Children. Following the discussion, all the qualities identified were reduced to a number of ‘must have’ qualities. The children and young people then had an opportunity to vote on the top ‘must have’ qualities and these were included in the advertisement for the job. The final advertisement included a person specification which stated that candidates must:

- be impartial, fair and have a genuine interest in solving problems
- be open minded and non-judgemental
- like and care for children
- be approachable, helpful and always there for children
- understand and respect children and embrace diversity
- have the ability to actively listen to, and engage positively with, children at their level
- be committed to consulting regularly with children on ever-changing issues facing them in the short, medium and long term



Figure 4: Drawing a ‘Body Map’

4.5 Analysis of consultation methodologies

Body maps are generally perceived to be good tools to find out how children and young people feel about an issue in an informal manner, and are suitable for those of various literacy levels (DCYA, 2015b). They are also suitable for use among younger children and older young people. For example, body maps were among the methods used in a consultation with young children aged 7-12 years who had previously spent time in hospital, in relation to the development of the New Children's Hospital in Ireland (DCYA, 2015b:103). Body mapping is also a means through which the feelings of respondents can be expressed in a non-threatening way (Meyburgh, 2006:19). Body mapping is often used as a tool for data collection in action research (Ebersöhn *et al*, 2007:138).

A 'graffiti wall' encourages participation in a natural way, facilitates casual anonymous remarks about an issue or a system and is a low-cost and time-efficient method to collect information (Martin and Hanington, 2012:96). Graffiti walls also allow children and young people to respond to a question in their own way over a long period of time (DCYA, 2015b). Limitations of the method include having little control over who participates and a lack of clear knowledge of who has contributed to the information collected (Martin and Hanington, 2012).

Overall, the methodologies used with children and young people in the consultation process worked very well and were age appropriate. The body map exercise is appropriate for both younger children and older young people and, therefore, was an inclusive methodology that all age groups could participate fully in. It successfully provided a non-threatening method for children and young people to express their views and opinions on an ideal Ombudsman for Children. Importantly, body mapping was suitable for those of all literacy levels and abilities, which was vital due to the varying ages and abilities of the wide range of children and young people involved. Finally, children and young people thought the body map exercise was a fun and engaging methodology, which added to their positive experience of the process.

The graffiti wall worked well as a methodology, due to its informal and anonymous nature. The fact that children and young people could write down their thoughts as they came to them during the consultation days meant that all ideas were captured well through both structured and unstructured activities. The graphic boards also appealed to the children and young people aesthetically. Lastly, the fact that the graphic boards are now hanging in the Office of the Ombudsman for Children is symbolic of the important role children and young people played in his appointment, and is an ongoing reminder of the responsibilities of the Ombudsman for Children to them, and to all other children and young people in Ireland.

4.6 Selection of a panel of children and young people

A panel of 13 children and young people were also selected at the consultation sessions to become involved in the recruitment process. Six were of primary school age and seven were of secondary school age. It was ensured that there was a mix of children and young people of different gender, race, ability and socio-economic backgrounds, with a particular focus on seldom-heard children and young people on the panel.

4.7 Children and young people's views on the consultations

Children and young people thought the consultation days were good fun, interesting, and they enjoyed meeting new people there. They enjoyed being part of what they felt was an important event. One young person described the day as “an ice-breaker” where people got to know each other better, especially those who were selected to be on the smaller panel of children and young people. They felt it was important that the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs attended the consultations, as it showed he wanted to hear what they thought about the Ombudsman for Children.

- *“I thought I was crazy ...I am actually here. It was good to be involved in something so important. It was really interesting.”* (Young person)
- *“Honestly, I thought that Ministers didn't care about children at all, but he really did make me feel that some people really care about children.”* (Child)

4.8 Children and young people's views on the presentations

The younger children found the presentations more difficult to understand than the older young people. In general, the children and young people felt the presentations were overly factual and repetitive and the language was “intellectual” and “hard to understand”. They suggested that the presentations should be “more child-oriented”, use “more common language” and be “snappier and to the point.” However, some young people found them interesting, enjoyed hearing a wide range of opinions from different people and felt it was important that they were informed about the topics covered. Some children and young people found the question and answer sessions after some presentations useful, and felt that the facilitators from DCYA were also helpful at explaining any words that were difficult to understand.

- *“They (presentations) were ok. Some parts were hard to understand.” (Child)*
- *“I thought the presentations were interesting but I could see people losing interest in them. They should have made them snappier and to the point. I think the language was ok but at one or two stages they could have used smaller words. Anne and Martin (facilitators) were good at explaining the words if you didn’t understand.” (Young person)*
- *I think they (presentations) were easy to understand and I didn’t know what the Ombudsman for Children was when I was going into the meeting, but they totally went through what they do and what their roles are and what they mean, and they were really open to any questions, and the people were very good at answering questions. The questions were answered really well and that was a good touch.” (Young person)*

4.9 Children and young people's views on the methodologies

The children and young people considered the body map exercise, which was used to generate characteristics for the job specification for the Ombudsman for Children, to be "interesting" and "a good idea." They thought the exercise encouraged everyone to have a say and put their ideas forward. Narrowing down the qualities proved to be difficult, but children and young people thought the way it was done was fair, and everyone's opinions were respected. All of the participants were happy with the qualities that were chosen for the advertisement; however, some young people suggested that more qualities could have been chosen for use in the job specification.

- *"We came up with the words for the ad for Ombudsman for Children and it was a good opportunity for everyone to have a say." (Young person)*
- *"I thought it (body map exercise) was a really good idea because everyone got to write down what they wanted and everyone agreed on what was on it, and not that it was stupid, and they were all valid and very good. I was surprised. I thought it was very hard to slim them down, but the ones we picked ... I am delighted we picked them." (Young person)*
- *"We came up with around 200 words from all the tables and everyone came up with different words. It was really difficult to narrow them down...but we were happy with them." (Young person)*
- *"I thought it was a good day. Loads of people put their ideas forward. They chose three characteristics, but I thought there should have been more." (Young person)*

4.10 Candidates' views on the job description

On the involvement of children and young people in the development of the job description one candidate commented that they thought some candidates might have felt the use of child-friendly language in the advertisement might have taken away from the serious nature of the post of Ombudsman for Children.

- *“I heard some people say the advertisement might have been a little bit less, it was worded in a way that might not give it the right weight the job should like to have and that is a risk. If you used lower or younger level language it may look like this isn’t a serious job, so there is a balance that had to be kept. You are talking about a high-level job and you don’t want people to not take it seriously, so you need a balance, but you don’t want to dilute the language either. It’s nice to say we want it to be a good person, but there has to be standards and at some stage you have to turn official.”* (Candidate)

4.11 Children and young people’s views on selection for the panel

When children and young people were selected at the consultation events to be part of the smaller panel of 13 for the remainder of the recruitment process, they felt “surprised”, “happy”, “excited” and “lucky.”

- *“I didn’t think I was going to be picked and I felt lucky.”*(Child)
- *“I was excited and looking forward to it because it is something different.”* (Child)

Children and young people thought the fact that panel members were from different backgrounds and of different ages, genders and abilities was important, fair, and gave a voice to those from different minority groups, such as young Travellers, young people in care and young people with disabilities.

- *I think they chose some who had a disability and some people in care to have a voice from every minority, so I thought that was fair and there was a good selection on the panel.”* (Young person)
- *“Everyone was good and really friendly and we were all from different backgrounds and that was good.”* (Young person)

Despite being from different backgrounds, ages and abilities, the children and young people all felt the panel got on very well, were nice to each other, listened to each other and were respectful of each other's views.

- *"We (panel) all got on well and everyone was listening to each other and not laughing at each other's views."*(Child)

Children and young people's selection for the panel also generated interest from family, teachers and friends. Some young people were asked to speak in their schools about the experience.

- *"I had to do a speech about it in my school over the intercom."* (Young person)
- *"The teacher thought I was going to be some sort of politician and was asking me lots of questions."* (Child)

Section 5: Preparation and involvement of children and young people in the interview process

5.1 Overview

This section details the preparation and involvement of children and young people in conducting role plays and interviewing candidates for the post of Ombudsman for Children.

5.2 Preparation workshops

During November/December 2014 and January 2015, workshops were conducted by DCYA and the PAS with the panel of 13 children and young people in order to:

- provide information on confidentiality, interviewing, equal treatment and marking of candidates
- identify topics for role plays
- identify a topic for a presentation by candidates
- practise carrying out role play sessions and interviewing

5.3 Final interview stage

At the final interview stage, 11 children and young people conducted a role play session with candidates based on topics developed by the children themselves. Two young people were part of the adult interview panel for a presentation by each shortlisted candidate. DCYA staff members were present on the day that the role plays and interviews took place, so as to provide support to the children and young people involved. However, in order to uphold the confidentiality of the process, DCYA staff members were not aware of the identity of the candidates.

5.4 Scoring

Children and young people's role was to assess the communication skills of candidates. Candidates were each given a score of A, B or C by the children and young people after the role plays, which was passed on to the adult interview panel. Similarly, the two young people on the interview panel gave candidates a score of A, B or C after each presentation

and communicated this directly to the adult members of the panel, along with an assessment comment. The two young people were given time on their own after each presentation to assess the candidates (while the adult members continued with the remainder of the interview) and they also had support from PAS personnel.

5.5 Information on confidentiality and interview skills

The PAS provided information to the children and young people on the issues of confidentiality, interviewing, equal treatment and marking of candidates. Explaining the concepts in child-friendly language was very important and they were happy that the children and young people understood and adhered to these concepts. Parents and guardians all felt that the children and young people took the confidentiality aspect of the process very seriously and observed it throughout.

- *“They (children and young people) needed to understand the principles of assessment, of fairness, consistency. Confidentiality was introduced early in the process and they really understood that and we got feedback from the parents that they were adhering to that. We had to get those messages across in a child-friendly way they seemed to really understand them.”* (PAS staff member)

5.6 Identifying topics for role plays and the presentation

Creative methodologies were used to support the children and young people in identifying issues for role plays for candidates and for a presentation by candidates. One of these was a consensus-building workshop in which the children and young people narrowed down relevant information supplied by the Office of the Ombudsman for Children, as well as key themes identified by children and young people, in order to decide the topics for further workshops.

Topics identified by children and young people included:

- Stupid rules
- Bad teachers
- Bullying

- Discrimination
- Lack of support

Children and young people were divided into separate groups of primary and secondary school students to pick role play topics based on their experiences of a number of themes. Brainstorming of issues for role plays was recorded by facilitators, and a number of stories emerged and were picked by each group for the role plays. The child or young person closest to the story acted out the role play.

- *“They (children and young people) picked aspects of themes like ‘stupid rules’. They had a list and they used them as a basis for stories. We (facilitators) recorded them brainstorming and then stories came out and then they agreed on them. Then they agreed that whoever was closest to the story should tell it, which was really nice.”* (DCYA staff member)
- *“I thought the topics worked well and what was really powerful was they got to choose their own stories and they each chose it and talked it through. And I thought that process worked well. They chose it and wrote it down. They owned the story and then brought it forward into the interview process.”* (DCYA staff member)

The topic for the presentation by candidates was identified by children and young people at one of the preparation workshops through small group discussions. The final topic decided on was:

- *‘What are the aspects of Children and Young People’s lives where you think they least have a voice and what would you, as Ombudsman for Children, do to address this?’*

5.7 Issues arising in preparation workshops

Some issues were identified in terms of educating and preparing children and young people in the concept of interviewing, and how candidates would feel when they were conducting the role plays. During the role play training, some of the children and young people took a

very assertive stance and felt they should be “grilling” the candidates. The facilitators addressed this issue by talking through scenarios and conducting mock role plays with the children and young people to help them understand how candidates might feel while they are being interviewed. The children and young people took this on board and tempered their outlook on the interview day. However, the facilitators highlighted the challenge of getting children and young people to understand the concept of how people feel in an interview, as it is something they have no life experience of.

5.8 Children and young people’s views on the preparation workshops

Overall, the panel of children and young people were happy with the methods used to identify and develop the role plays. They thought that voting on the topics and issues was a fair way of selecting them, and they were happy with the final topic and issues that were chosen.

- *“I remember we got split into groups and brainstormed situations that you might have and bring to the Ombudsman for Children. Like in school, because that was the big issue, and we put them under headline issues and we had a vote on it and picked the ones we thought would be an issue for different age categories. The way it was done was really fair and I was happy with the topic and they were genuine problems.”* (Young person)

Children and young people felt strongly that identifying and developing topics and scenarios for the role plays from their own experiences was very important. As a result, they found it easy to come up with ideas and stories, thought it was more realistic and genuine, and were able to put themselves into the scenarios easily.

- *“They were true stories like about school scenarios and things that had happened in our schools.”* (Child)

- *“I think it is very important to talk about things that relate to you because you are going to put emotion into it and you’ll see how they (candidates) react to it.”* (Young person)

5.9 Children and young people’s views on the role play experience

In general, the children and young people felt well prepared for the role plays on the interview day. Only one young person said they would have liked more time to rehearse the role plays. Children and young people reported feeling both excited and nervous on the day of the role plays.

- *“I wasn’t really nervous. I was more excited.”* (Child)
- *“We were very well prepared and we were able to answer what the candidates would ask us about the scenarios. On the day I was a bit nervous, but after the first one it was ok, and we said this is actually fine, and the nerves settled down.”* (Young person)

Some children and young people were conscious of the responsibility attached to their involvement in helping to choose an Ombudsman for Children, which made them nervous. However, they felt less nervous and more comfortable as the day went on. Talking to each other and to members of the PAS, who were present at the role plays on the day, helped the children and young people to feel less nervous and carry out their duties.

- *“It was a lot of responsibility.”* (Child)
- *“We didn’t want the whole country to blame us!”* (Child)
- *“I was terrified because what if I made the wrong choice. It was nice to hear other people’s opinions. It gave me more ideas on what to judge them on.”* (Young person)

The children and young people had empathy for the candidates and recognised that the role play part of the interview must have been difficult, intimidating and nerve-wracking for them. However, some of the children and young people felt that the role plays were a good preparation for the candidates in terms of the job of Ombudsman for Children, where they would have to communicate and deal with children and young people and their issues on a regular basis.

- *“They (candidates) could have been very intimidated because there were 11 of us sitting there.”* (Young person)
- *“Yes it (the role play) was difficult because kids can be so critical.”* (Young person)
- *“I’d say they (candidates) found it difficult. A couple of times I passed people preparing and some were nervous enough and you felt bad for them...It would have been nerve-wracking at the time, but prepared them for the job.”* (Young person)

On the day, children and young people felt that some of the candidates performed better than others. They reported that some candidates communicated well while others lacked communication skills or the ability to relate to them as children and young people. Some candidates appeared nervous and did not react well to questions posed by the children and young people. Overall, the children and young people thought the way the candidates dealt with the role plays was a good reflection of how they might act as Ombudsman for Children.

- *“I felt some of the answers we got back were really good.”* (Young person)
- *“I thought it (role plays) was a great idea. It gave you a true idea of what things they (candidates) would do.”* (Child)

In terms of marking the candidates, some members of the panel showed a preference for different candidates. However, the majority of children and young people on the panel favoured the successful candidate and they felt happy their decision was the right one.

- *“I thought at times it was really hard. Some people had very strong feelings for one candidate or another and then when we were grading and giving notes like wandering from the point or kept eye contact...the majority favoured the same candidate, but one or two thought another person should (get it) but after we were all happy and agreed it was the right decision.”* (Young person)
- *“He (the successful candidate) was very good and was able to answer people’s questions. The others were able to answer questions, but not as good as him. Everyone picked that he was the best.”* (Child)

5.10 Candidates’ views on the role plays

The two candidates who were interviewed for the report were very impressed with the children and young people who participated in the role plays. They described them as “amazing,” “well prepared” and “attentive” and thought their questions were “brilliant, challenging and interesting.”

- *“I thought the young people were well prepared and I was very impressed with all of them. They were all very attentive even when they weren’t involved directly.”* (Candidate)
- *“The questions were brilliant, challenging and interesting, they were exactly the complaints we would get and were real to them.”* (Candidate)

However, both candidates found the role play sessions with children and young people very challenging. They would have liked more information beforehand on how the children and young people were briefed for the role plays in terms of their understanding of the role of the Ombudsman for Children.

- *“For me it (the role play) was very difficult. It would have been really helpful to get the briefing materials of the understanding of the children of the Ombudsman for Children.”* (Candidate)

One candidate argued that the role play scenarios were not true to life in terms of the role of the Ombudsman for Children and they felt that, in reality, none of the scenarios would have ended up before the Ombudsman. As a result, the candidate felt the role plays were unrealistic and they felt “false” giving advice to children and young people on the issues raised.

- *“All of those scenarios would have never got to the Ombudsman for Children, but just before you go into the room you are told they are basing these on real life situations...They (children and young people) were amazing, but how were they to know what the role of the Ombudsman for Children was? I remember thinking none of them would get to the Ombudsman for Children. You would never have a role in cases. I felt quite false in there and I was trying to share my advice on issues but I knew I would never be in that position again.”* (Candidate)

One candidate felt their role play went very well while the other was unhappy with how theirs went. This candidate would have liked to interact with the children and young people more, for example, shake hands with all of them. They felt it was a bit “staged” and would have preferred if the role play was less formal.

- *“I felt the role play went very well and I came out of the room energised.”* (Candidate)
- *“I was brought in by the chairperson and told it would last around 20 minutes. There was a semi-circle and they all said their name and I sat in a chair in the front. I didn’t feel I interacted with the kids. Like I didn’t get to shake their hands or say hello to them. I felt I didn’t get to deal with them the way I would have liked. It was*

challenging. I was afraid some of the young people didn't get to talk to me or ask questions." (Candidate)

5.11 PAS view on the role plays

Overall, the PAS was very happy with the way the role plays were conducted. However, it was felt that the number of children and young people involved in these (11) was relatively large, from the perspective of PAS resources. They also felt it was difficult for the candidates to deal with such a large number of children and young people at once. This point was also picked up by the candidates themselves, who felt it was difficult to interact with all of them in the short time they had, and felt they only got to engage with the four children who carried out role plays.

5.12 Children and young people's views on selection for the interview panel

Young people on the panel of 13 were asked to volunteer to be part of the adult interview panel. Those who put themselves forward were then voted for by their peers, and two were selected. The children and young people were happy with the selection process. They considered voting for the two young people to be fair, and judged the selection of two older teenagers to be appropriate. Some thought younger children might not have been mature, knowledgeable or confident enough for the role on the adult interview panel.

- *"I think it was fair there was one girl and one boy, and they were both the same age. I wouldn't be at ease if there was a person from primary school, in case they weren't prepared enough."* (Young person)
- *"I think it was good we got to vote on it, and they were the two older ones and they would have been able to keep calm in the situation and be in a formal situation. I would have burst out laughing. They understand more and could do better."* (Child)
- *"Someone in primary school might look really out of place sitting there with all the adults."* (Child)

One young person who was selected suggested that there should have been three young people on the interview panel, to equal the number of adults on the panel, and that a younger child should also have been represented on the panel.

- *“Maybe I would have had three young people there. I would have liked if it was equal representation of young people and adults, and have a representation of younger children on the panel. It would depend on the person they chose but some of them would have been well able for it.”* (Young person)

5.13 Young people’s views on involvement in the adult interview panel

The two young people on the adult interview panel felt they were well prepared and confident on the day of the interview. They found the training days with the PAS and the mock interviews very helpful, and felt it prepared them well for the interview.

- *“I think we were prepared. We are quite confident. I don’t know if it would have suited someone a bit shy and it is people who are a big deal and a bit intimidating. I was glad we got chosen because we are confident.”* (Young person)
- *“We were definitely well prepared. We had mock interviews with someone, and we had to ask him questions and we couldn’t think of any at the time, and we were a bit shy and we felt bad for him. But it was really good to have that experience and to know what to expect and not to be clueless. We couldn’t have got a better mentor.”* (Young person)

Both young people admitted feeling nervous on the day, with one more nervous than the other. However, they were both put at ease by members of the interview panel who showed them great empathy and understanding.

- *“I was a little bit nervous before I knew what I was walking into. It was just because I was unsure, and the fear of the unknown. After we met all the people it was fine, and*

they were lovely to us and then we got used to the situation and we were comfortable.” (Young person)

- *“I was very nervous. I was shaking going in and was nearly as nervous as the candidates. They (interview panel members) were really nice and put me at ease.” (Young person)*

Overall, the two young people found the interview day very intense, tiring and hard work but enjoyed their involvement in it.

- *“It was very intense and different from what I thought. You had to really pay attention and take in what everyone was saying. And on the day there was several interviews. It was warm in the room and we were wrecked, but you had to keep your game face on. I didn’t think it would be as tough as it was.” (Young person)*

The two young people stated that they would have liked to have been involved in the whole interview, not just the presentation aspect. They were particularly interested in having more involvement the assessment of the candidate during the interview and the selection process afterwards. However, one young person felt stronger than the other about being involved in the whole process and suggested they could have been involved in the selection process at the end.

- *“I would have preferred if we were involved in the whole interview. When it gets around to choosing we should have had a say in selecting.” (Young person)*
- *“I’d probably like to be there for the whole thing, but I suppose I had no issue being sent out. I would be nosey, so I would have liked to find out for my benefit. I would have benefited, but there was no need to be there and I have no problem with not being there.” (Young person)*

These two young people had mixed views on whether the adult members of the interview panel listened to their opinions on the candidates. While both of the young people trusted

the adults' decision in terms of the successful candidate, one young person felt frustrated that their opinion on the candidates was not listened to. However, the other young person accepted that not every candidate was going to appeal to everyone, and reasoned that other factors probably contributed to the overall final decision.

- *"I think in the interview process, I don't think they listened to our voices a lot. I think they listened to the smaller kids more and they listened to themselves. I don't think our opinions were listened to. It was a bit frustrating...I trust the adults' decision though."* (Young person)
- *"I think they heard our input and when we disagreed they were very willing to listen. We changed the way the adults were thinking and they hadn't noticed something and they said 'that is why we did'."* (Young person)
- *"Everyone is going to have a different opinion. No one is going to appeal to everyone."* (Young person)

The idea of a 'debrief' or greater involvement in the selection process was put forward by the young people. They both felt this would have helped their understanding of the overall selection process and why candidates were selected.

- *"If we were there for the overall discussion ...like even a ten-minute debrief to see overall what we were thinking and what they were thinking. I would have found it interesting to see how they went about picking who was the best and I would have liked to know why they picked the person who got it over the other."* (Young person)

5.14 Candidates' views on the involvement of young people in the interview panel

The two candidates consulted for the report were very impressed with the two young people on the interview panel. They described them as "brilliant", "impassioned", "well prepared" and "very clued in" and their questions as "appropriate", "insightful" and "challenging." Both candidates found this part of the interview difficult, different and challenging.

- *“I think the presentation went well and the young people were very clued into it and had some very insightful and challenging questions and pushed me hard. Like had I done any research for it and talked to any young people for the interview. I think it was probably my least productive part for me.”* (Candidate)
- *“They (young people) asked a lot of appropriate questions.”* (Candidate)

One of the candidates thought the presentation aspect of the interview was “a strange part of the process” and the young people’s involvement in it felt “awkward and contrived.” They felt that involving them in only this part of the interview was tokenistic. They would have preferred if the two young people were involved for the whole interview to keep the integrity of the panel, to let the young people get to know the candidates better and suggested that the presentation could have been made at the end of the interview when everyone was more relaxed.

- *“I thought the two young people were well prepared but it just felt awkward and contrived. I would have preferred if they were there for the whole interview to get to know you and come back to you with questions and you could have done the presentation at the end. It just didn’t feel right. I know what was trying to be achieved but I just didn’t get it...I just felt it was tokenistic more so than the role play.”* (Candidate)

The other candidate had no difficulty with the idea of the two young people being involved for the whole interview, but did not feel as strongly about this issue. They thought the involvement of young people on the adult interview panel was reflective of the challenges of the role of the Ombudsman for Children, where they would have to deal with both adults and young people on a daily basis.

- *“It is like the job, switching and changing the whole time, like talking to the Minister one minute and then a youth group the next.”* (Candidate)

They also believed that the two young people, in their capacity as young people, brought genuineness and insightfulness to the interview that the adults would not have had without their input. They felt the two young people were judging the candidates through the eyes of a young person rather than through those of a policy-maker, which meant they brought a different set of questions to the table compared with those of the adults.

- *“Presenting to the young people and adults was fine. It was a different insight to the adults. They (young people) were impassioned in what they were doing and fair play to them they were brilliant.”* (Candidate)
- *“The strengths were they brought a whole different set of questions than anyone else. They weren’t looking at policy, but how would it affect me as a person and how would you deal with it. There was more genuineness rather than a 40-year-old civil servant. There was real genuineness to it.”* (Candidate)

One of the candidates would have liked more information in advance about the roles the two young people had on the interview panel, for example in relation to the scoring, and some background information on them to tailor the presentation and answers. Finally, from a practical perspective, one of the candidates would have preferred if there was a screen available for their presentation, as they felt that this would have made them less uncomfortable and the situation feel less staged. The other candidate would have liked if they had been given more time to prepare for the presentation, and thought the topic was too wide.

- *“I wasn’t sure what the role of young people was. I was just told they would be asking the questions before I went in. I didn’t know anything about these young people other than they were teenagers... I didn’t know was I trying to persuade them and in what context. And was it just them I was trying to persuade or the adults, or what background they were from, like urban rural, and in school, out of school.”* (Candidate)

5.15 Views of adult members of the interview panel

The two adult members of the interview panel consulted as part of this report thought the involvement of the two young people on the interview panel was a great idea and very important due to the advocacy role of the Ombudsman for Children. They felt that an Ombudsman for Children should be able to communicate, interact and relate to young people as part of their job and that this could be best judged by including young people in the interview process.

- *“There has to be a direct interface between the Ombudsman for Children and children, so they have to understand and communicate with children and in a way they understand, and that they feel empowered to talk back to them. You could have a bunch of adults that would assume what might make a good Ombudsman for Children; no it was critical for them to be involved.”* (Member of interview panel)
- *“For me, the surprise was that there was one candidate that was young and young at heart but yet that was a person that young people didn’t warm to in the way they communicated. It was a salutary lesson.”* (Member of interview panel)

Both adult members of the interview panel thought the two young people were very mature, assertive, well prepared, well supported on the day, understood the process well, asked insightful questions, worked well together and, overall, made a very meaningful contribution to the interview process. They felt the older teenagers were more suited to being part of the adult interview panel than younger children.

- *“It was quite clear they (young people) had been very well prepared. I thought they might be nervous asking questions, but they were great. They totally understood the process, so they both came in with really good questions afterwards. They had different questions, which meant they were listening well. They asked questions about things they liked and they disliked that was said. They made a very meaningful contribution.”* (Member of interview panel)

- *“The two young people were very impressive. They were very mature, surprisingly mature, and some of that came from the preparation...They were quite assertive with the candidates and thoughtful with the questions they asked. They didn’t tread on each other’s ground, and were listening carefully to each other and not repeating issues. In the analysis afterwards, equally it was as if they were doing it every day. And we were a very adult audience which was accommodating, but I was really impressed with the quality of the contribution they brought to it.”* (Member of interview panel)

The adult members of the panel also felt that the two young people not only put forward their own viewpoints to the candidates, but also represented the overall perspective of the other 11 children and young people who were involved in the wider recruitment process.

- *“You were conscious they weren’t there just carrying their own viewpoint, but also a perspective from the group dynamic they were involved in as well.”* (Member of interview panel)

While the adult members of the interview panel emphasised that the two young people made a “real and meaningful contribution” to the ultimate result, they were concerned that the young people might have thought their opinions were not considered because they did not have full visibility on the scoring and final selection process. The adult members felt strongly that the young people’s involvement and contribution was not tokenism, and they suggested that if they could have provided feedback, a ‘debrief’ or ‘wrap-up’ to the young people at the end of the day on the scoring and selection process, it might have overcome this issue.

- *“The verdict was significantly influenced by what they (young people) had to say. There was no sense that this was going to be a phoney, token gesture, and that is the only way to approach it if you involved a group of young people and it had to be with the good reason that you are going to sit up and listen to them.”* (Member of interview panel)
- *“It did sit slightly awkwardly with me that they might have had a perception that we would have dismissed their opinions. If they were there for all the interviews, they*

would have seen it wasn't tokenism...The best way to do it is to show them all the evidence." (Member of interview panel)

- *"If the adults got to meet the young people from the panel at the end of the day to say this is what we ultimately decided. We were relying on Public Appointments Service to do that, which probably worked brilliantly, but maybe a wrap-up at the end would have been good."* (Member of interview panel)

Although including the two young people in the whole interview might have given them better visibility and understanding of the overall result, the adult members of the interview panel did not think this should have been the case. While one of them saw the value of including them in the whole interview, they both felt children and young people had a strong involvement in the whole recruitment process and that the balance of involvement was right.

- *"It's hard to say if young people should have been involved in the whole interview. I can see value in it. It's a very labour-intensive process, but you often have to compromise on things because there are a lot of logistics around these things. They were heavily involved in job spec, the presentations and the role plays."* (Member of interview panel)
- *I don't think they (young people) should have been there for the whole interview. When you get that point of the interview, there are issues that come into play that should stay in the room. I don't doubt their integrity, but there has to be a balance, like candidates come in and expose their souls and the right of young people to be involved. I think the balance was right."* (Member of interview panel)

Finally, it was suggested that introducing the young people and adult members of the interview panel to each other before the interview would have been a good idea. While some adult members had met the young people prior to the interview, some had not, which meant there was little time to break the ice and engage with each other beforehand.

Section 6: Analysis of the strengths, limitations and impacts of the process

6.1 Overview

This section provides an analysis of the main strengths, limitations and impacts of the process of involving children and young people in the recruitment of the Ombudsman for Children. Lundy's Model of Participation is used to assess the participative process, drawing on the checklist developed as a means of verifying that children have the space to express their views; that their voice is enabled; that they have an audience for their views; and that their views will have influence. See Lundy's Model of Participation in Section 1 (See Figure 1).

6.2 Key strengths

The main strengths identified by key stakeholders involved in the process included:

- children and young people's participation in decision-making
- the unique insight of children and young people
- the age appropriateness of the process
- the diversity of children and young people involved
- methodology strengths

6.3 Children and young people's participation in decision-making

Children and young people's participation in decision-making as part of the recruitment process for the Ombudsman for Children was identified as a key strength by all but one stakeholder. The majority of stakeholders judged their involvement in the process as very important and some described it as critical, as these are the primary target audience of the Ombudsman for Children, and the post has an advocacy role with this group. Involving the perspectives of this group in the development of services that directly impact on them is proven to make services more effective. As Head (2011: 543) argues, 'services, programs and policies that have direct impacts on young people...will be more effective if young people's perspectives are engaged in the planning, delivery and evaluation of services.'

From a policy perspective, involving children and young people in the recruitment process for the Ombudsman for Children is consistent with the vision of *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures: The National Policy Framework for Children & Young People 2014-2020*; the priority goal of the *National Strategy on Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-making 2015-2020*, which is to ensure that children and young people will have a voice in their individual and collective everyday lives; and Article 12 of the UNCRC.

6.4 Unique insight of children and young people

All stakeholders agreed that children and young people brought a unique insight to the recruitment process. They were uniquely placed to be able to judge if the candidates were able to communicate, interact and relate to them as children and young people. It was felt that this type of assessment could not have been achieved without involving this group in the process, as they are the 'experts' on this issue. Adult members of the panel agreed that they would have not been able to judge the ability of candidates to communicate, interact and relate to young people without their involvement. This corresponds with Kellett's (2010: 195) view that children and young people have 'a unique "insider" perspective critical to our understanding of their worlds.'

6.5 Age appropriateness of the process

The age-appropriate nature of the process was deemed to be a key strength. When developing the process, DCYA was mindful that children and young people should be involved in a capacity relative to their age and abilities, and should not be put under undue pressure. It was felt that some processes which were reviewed as part of the development of this process were very long and demanding for the children and young people involved. Methodologies used, such as the body map exercise, the wall of ideas and the role plays, were also considered to be age appropriate. Creating an age/maturity-appropriate supportive environment for informed expression is very important in terms of participation involving children and young people. For example, the *Practice Standards in Children's Participation* (Save the Children 2005) promote creating a 'safe, welcoming and encouraging environment' for children to participate.

6.6 Diversity of children and young people involved

The involvement of a mix of children and young people from different backgrounds was judged to be a key strength of the process. In recruiting children and young people, attention was paid to ensuring a gender, race, ability and socio-economic mix, with particular focus on seldom-heard children and young people. The mix of backgrounds also reflected the key issues and types of children and young people that the Office of Ombudsman for Children deals with. All stakeholders agreed that the diversity of children and young people involved was a good idea, and added to the fairness and credibility of the process. This diversity is in line with one of DCYA's (2015a: 23) core principles of participation, which states that 'the right of children and young people to participate applies without discrimination on any grounds, such as race, ethnicity, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, disability, birth, sexual orientation or other status.' The focus on including seldom-heard children and young people also mirrors another principle of participation (DCYA: 2015a:23), which states that 'particular efforts should be made to enable participation of children and young people with fewer opportunities, including those who are vulnerable or affected by discrimination, including multiple discrimination.'

6.7 Methodology strengths

According to stakeholders, some of the key strengths of the process were the methodologies used to involve children and young people in interviewing candidates, e.g. through role plays and representation on the interview panel. One of the key strengths of the role plays was that the stories came from the children and young people's own experiences, which made them more authentic and realistic. Young people recruited through Comhairle na nÓg were asked to have some personal experience or understanding of the issues most investigated by the Ombudsman for Children, which proved effective. Also, when developing the stories for the role plays, those who were closest to the story delivered it on the day of the interview. Acting out a role play scenario that was from their

own life experience meant that the children and young people were impassioned, had a genuine understanding of the subject matter, and were able to ask relevant questions.

As with the role plays, the involvement of young people on the adult interview panel enabled the adult members to get feedback on how well the young people thought candidates communicated, interacted and related to young people. The two young people were also able to bring forward issues to the adult members of the panel related to the larger group of children and young people and their peers. When children and young people are involved in interviewing or research processes they bring specific and unique qualities on issues that are relevant to young people, including access to their peers and effectiveness in interviewing (DCYA, 2015c: 42)

6.8 Key limitations

The main limitations identified in the consultation with key stakeholders included those related to:

- the rationale
- the consultations
- the role plays
- including young people on the adult interview panel

6.9 Limitations related to the rationale

One candidate highlighted what they felt were limitations related to the rationale for involving children and young people in the recruitment process for the Ombudsman for Children. They wondered whether children and young people were involved purely because they had been involved in the previous appointment of an Ombudsman for Children. They felt that care should be taken in the way this group is involved in the process, in order to ensure that it is done for the right reasons and is not perceived as tokenistic. Such concerns around the issue of tokenism in children and young people's involvement in decision-making are commonplace. According to Hinton *et al* (2008), 'even amongst the most ardent

supporters of children and young people, there are concerns about tokenism and lack of impact.'

6.10 Consultation methodology limitations

Children and young people suggested that the presentation aspect of the consultation days could have been shorter and the presentations could have been more child-oriented in terms of their use of language. The use of youth-friendly language in youth participation processes such as this is very important to young people (Vromen and Collin, 2010). In terms of identifying the ideal qualities for the person specification for Ombudsman for Children, some young people thought it was difficult to narrow all the qualities suggested to a smaller number. One candidate questioned whether using child-friendly language in the advertisement for the post perhaps took away from the serious nature of the position.

6.11 Role play limitations

A number of limitations were identified in relation to the role plays. These included challenges in preparing children and young people on the concept of interviewing, of which they have no life experience. Members of the PAS, as well as candidates, felt that the large number of children and young people involved in the role plays was a limitation. Candidates found it difficult to engage with all 11 children and young people in the role play and felt that the scenarios were unrealistic and staged.

Both candidates, and one parent, suggested that the role plays would have worked better if they were conducted in a less formal setting, where children and young people felt more comfortable. They thought that consulting with children and young people in their own environment, for example a school, youth club or sports club, would work better rather than bringing them into a formal adult space.

DCYA (2015d: 84) identifies 'the creation of a safe space and age/maturity-appropriate supportive environment for informed expression' as a common element of international participation standards. For example, one of the Save the Children (2005) participation

standards relates to creating a 'safe, welcoming and encouraging environment' for children to participate and another refers to the 'development of a process-specific child protection strategy, including an accessible complaints mechanism for participating children'.

6.12 Limitations of involving young people in the adult interview panel

The main limitation identified by the two young people on the adult interview panel and by adult members of the interview panel was a lack of visibility on the scoring and final selection process. While both young people would have liked to have been involved in the whole interview, in order to gain a greater understanding of the process, adult members of the interview panel did not think this was necessary. One of the candidates argued that the two young people should have been involved in the whole interview, and questioned whether their involvement in part of the interview was tokenistic. A number of different stakeholders suggested that a meeting or debrief for the young people on the scoring and selection process would have helped to alleviate any fears the young people had that their opinions were not taken into consideration by adult members of the panel or that their involvement was tokenistic.

The importance of feedback and understanding how decisions are made is highlighted in international standards of best practice in terms of children and young people's involvement in participation processes (Welsh Government; NSW Commission for Children and Young People, 2004). Similarly, one of the principles of participation outlined in the *National Strategy on Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-making* (DCYA, 2015a) states that 'children and young people should always be fully informed of the scope of their participation, including the limitations on their involvement, the expected and actual outcomes of their participation, and how their views were ultimately considered.'

6.13 Key impacts of the process

A number of impacts relating to children and young people's involvement in the recruitment process were identified by children and young people themselves, as well as by their parents and guardians. These included personal impacts, family impacts, community

impacts and societal impacts. These findings are similar to those of DCYA (2015d, 2015e), which found significant impacts for children and young people involved in participation structures, and for their families, their communities and society.

6.14 Personal impacts

Personal impacts included personal development such as increased self-confidence and self-esteem, and social development such as increased social skills and meeting new people. Personal impacts appeared to be strongest for seldom-heard children and young people, e.g. those with physical and learning disabilities and those from minority backgrounds. Children and young people also developed new personal skills related to the process, such as communication and interview skills. Some young people developed an interest in politics and current affairs and became more aware of children and young people's rights.

6.15 Family impacts

The involvement of children and young people in the recruitment of the Ombudsman for Children was a source of great pride for parents and guardians and extended family members. Some parents and guardians noticed that their children had become more aware of their right to be heard within the context of their family after participating in the process. Parents and guardians also became aware of the Office of the Ombudsman for Children and the services it provides.

6.16 Community impacts

Community impacts included raising awareness of participation, children's rights and the Office of the Ombudsman for Children among the friends and peers of those involved in the process. For example, a number of children and young people were asked to speak about their experiences in their schools as a result of taking part in the process. The parent of one young person from the Traveller community who was involved in the process felt that their child had become a positive role model for other young Travellers because of their involvement in the recruitment of the Ombudsman for Children.

6.17 Societal impacts

Finally, all key stakeholders felt that children and young people who were involved in the process had an impact on society in terms of the active role they played in the recruitment of the Ombudsman for Children.

6.18 Summary of findings

The process of involving children and young people in the recruitment of the Ombudsman for Children was generally viewed as a very positive experience from the perspective of the key stakeholders involved. They identified the main strength of the process as being the active participation of children and young people in decision-making related to the recruitment of the new Ombudsman.

From a policy perspective, involving children and young people in the recruitment process supports their right to participate in decisions that affect their lives, and to have their voices heard and their opinions given due weight in line with Article 12 of the UNCRC, the vision of *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures: The National Policy Framework for Children and Young People*, and the priority goal of the *National Strategy on Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-making*.

Other key strengths identified included the unique insight children and young people brought to the process, the age appropriateness of the process, the diversity of children and young people involved and the methodologies used. Some limitations highlighted by stakeholders included those related to the rationale for including children and young people in the recruitment process, and those related to the consultation days, role plays, and the involvement of young people in the adult interview panel.

A number of impacts of the participation process were identified, including personal, family, community and societal impacts. This is consistent with recent research findings which show that participation in decision-making structures can have significant impacts for the participants, their families, communities and society.

6.19 Evaluation of consultation process using Lundy’s Voice Model Checklist for Participation

It is important to assess the participation experiences of those involved in the recruitment of the Ombudsman for Children against a ‘best practice’ model of participation such as Lundy’s (2007) Model of Participation. Lundy’s Voice Model Checklist for Participation (see Figure 5) was developed as part of the *National Strategy on Children and Young People’s Participation in Decision-Making*. The aim of the checklist, against which a participative process can be assessed, is to help organisations working with and for children and young people to comply with Article 12 of the UNCRC and ensure that children have the space to express their views; their voice is enabled; they have an audience for their views; and their views will have influence.

Figure 5: Lundy’s Voice Model Checklist for Participation



The checklist takes the form of a 'How' statement and three questions under each of the headings: Space, Voice, Audience and Influence. The process of involving children and young people in the recruitment and selection of the Ombudsman for Children is assessed below using this checklist.

Space

How: Provide a safe and inclusive space for children to express their views.

Have children's views been actively sought?

- Two consultations were held to seek the views of children and young people on the qualities necessary for an Ombudsman for Children.
- Further consultations were held to identify relevant role play scenarios that children and young people had experience of, which could be relevant to the work of the Ombudsman.

Was there a safe space in which children can express themselves freely?

- Children and young people were given safe, inclusive opportunities to form and express their views, for example on the consultation days and at the preparation workshops.
- While children and young people were given the opportunity to express their views in a safe environment, the location for the final role play and interviews could, perhaps, have been less formal and more child- and youth-friendly. Conducting the role plays in a child- and youth-friendly space such as a school, youth club or sports club might have made children and young people, as well as candidates, less nervous and provided a more realistic setting and scenario for candidates.

Have steps been taken to ensure that all children can take part?

- Children and young people from diverse backgrounds were included in the process and there was an emphasis on involving seldom-heard voices.

- Following a request for volunteers to take part in the second stage of the process, the selection process conducted by adults was intended to ensure that a mix of children and young people, in terms of age, ability, experience and capacity, were involved.

Voice

How: Provide appropriate information and facilitate the expression of children’s views.

Have children been given the information they need to form a view?

- Information relevant to recruitment and the role of the Ombudsman was provided to all participants as part of the consultations.
- Questions from children and young people were welcomed by all presenters at the consultations.
- A number of younger children found information in some presentations difficult to understand, but further explanations, in more child-friendly language, were provided to those children afterwards by facilitators.

Do children know that they do not have to take part?

- Yes, this was stipulated in the assent and consent forms.
- Children and young people volunteered to take part in the second stage of the process.

Have children been given a range of options as to how they might choose to express themselves?

- Children and young people were very well facilitated to express their views throughout the process. Methodologies such as the ‘body map exercise’ and the ‘wall of ideas’ worked well at the consultation days to allow children and young people to express their views, in an inclusive, age-appropriate manner, on the type of person the Ombudsman for Children should be.

- The voice of children and young people was central to the role play scenarios, which were developed from the experiences of children and young people themselves and delivered by those closest to the role play story.

Audience

How: Ensure that children’s views are communicated to someone with the responsibility to listen.

Is there a process for communicating children’s views?

- The consultations on the recruitment of the Ombudsman for Children were established at the request of, and with the support of, the PAS, which is responsible for the appointment of the Ombudsman.
- Discussions about how the views of children and young people would be included in the decision-making process took place prior to the recruitment of children and young people.

Do children know who their views are being communicated to?

- The role of DCYA and the PAS was outlined to the children and young people as part of the information section of the consultations.

Does the person/body have the power to make decisions?

- The views of children and young people were listened to in relation to the ideal qualities for the person specification for the Ombudsman for Children and were included in the advertisement for the post.

Influence:

How: Ensure that children’s views are taken seriously and acted upon, where appropriate.

Were the children’s views considered by those with the power to effect change?

- Adult members of the interview panel listened to the views of children and young people regarding the candidates.
- While children and young people involved in the role plays and in the interview panel felt their views were listened to, the two young people on the adult interview panel questioned if their views were acted on in the final decision-making process.
- A number of factors, such as not involving the two young people in the first round of interviews, not involving them in the scoring or deliberation process, and not

providing adequate feedback may have contributed to the perception that the views of the two young people were not acted on. Increased visibility through inclusion of the two young people in the whole interview and in the scoring and selection process after the interview could, perhaps, have addressed these concerns.

Are there procedures in place that ensure that the children's views have been taken seriously?

- The PAS put procedures in place to ensure that the views of the children and young people involved in the final stages of the recruitment process were included in the final consideration by the adult panel.

Have the children and young people been provided with feedback explaining the reasons for decisions taken?

- The children and young people who were involved in the final recruitment stages of the process were informed by DCYA of the outcome of the selection process.
- The two young people on the adult interview panel could have been provided with more detailed information and feedback on the final decision-making process.

6.20 Summary of assessment against Lundy's Voice Model Checklist for Participation

Overall, the process of involving children and young people in the recruitment of the Ombudsman for Children met the key criteria of Lundy's Voice Model Checklist for Participation: space, voice, audience, influence. In terms of space, children and young people's views were actively sought throughout the process and extensive steps were taken to ensure that children and young people from a wide range of backgrounds participated in each stage of the process. While children and young people were provided with safe spaces to express themselves, they may have felt freer and more comfortable expressing their views in a less formal and more child- and youth-friendly environment.

With regard to voice, children and young people were provided with relevant information about the process, they were made aware that participation was completely voluntary and were enabled to express their views through a wide range of age-appropriate methodologies. A number of younger children found information provided in some presentations difficult to understand, but this difficulty was overcome through facilitators

explaining the information further in more child-friendly terms. In relation to audience, a clear process was established to communicate children and young people's views; children and young people were given information on who their views would be communicated to, and the views of children and young people were listened to throughout the process.

Finally, regarding influence, procedures were put in place to ensure that children and young people's views were taken seriously in relation to the recruitment of the Ombudsman for Children, and the majority of children and young people felt they had an influence on the final outcome. Concerns relating to influence were raised by the two young people on the adult interview panel; these concerns could possibly have been alleviated through including them in the final deliberations or providing greater visibility and feedback on the final selection process.

Recommendations

- Children and young people should continue to be involved in future recruitment processes for the Ombudsman for Children.
- Information on the process provided to children and young people should be age-appropriate and child- and youth-friendly, e.g. presentations.
- Role plays and interviews with candidates should take place in less formal and more child- and youth-friendly environments.
- Role plays could be conducted with a smaller number of children and young people.
- Children and young people on the adult interview panel should meet members of the panel prior to the final interview.
- More information and feedback should be provided to children and young people on the scoring and selection processes for the role plays and interviews.
- Children and young people on the adult interview panel could be included in the whole interview.
- There should be more visibility for children and young people on the adult interview panel on the scoring and selection process, e.g. be present when it is taking place.
- Information could be provided to candidates on the background of the children and young people involved in the role plays and interviews.

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