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

Policy and Literature Review of Goal 1 of the National Children's Strategy, 2000-2010

'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.'

DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND YOUTH AFFAIRS

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This study was commissioned by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs to inform development of a national strategy on children and young people's participation in decision-making for *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures: The National Policy Framework for Children and Young People, 2014-2020*. The authors of the report are:

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Contents

Acknowledgements

SECTION 1:
Introduction and Methodology

1.1 National Children's Strategy, 2000-2010

The National Children's Strategy, *Our Children – Their Lives*, was adopted in 2000 as the first comprehensive national policy dealing with matters affecting children (Department of Health and Children, 2000). Described as a '*high mark in central government policy-making with regards to Irish children*' (Pinkerton, 2006), the strategy identified as its vision:

> 'An Ireland where children are respected as young citizens with a valued contribution to make and a voice of their own; where all children are cherished and supported by family and the wider society; where they enjoy a fulfilling childhood and realise their potential.'

The strategy's development was supported by a range of interdepartmental, research and non-governmental experts, and it was informed by consultation with children and young people and invited submissions. The strategy is grounded in six operational principles, namely that all actions taken will be child-centred, family-oriented, equitable, inclusive, action-oriented and integrated. It recognises that children have an innate dignity as human beings; enrich the quality of all our lives; are especially vulnerable; thrive through the love and support of a family life; should be supported to explore, enjoy and develop their varied talents; and need help to learn responsibility as they grow towards adulthood and full citizenship. Significantly, this 'whole child' perspective was used to develop the three national goals that underpin *Our Children – Their Lives* and address key aspects of all children's lives. These goals, which are mutually reinforcing, are:

Goal 1 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.

Goal 2 Children's lives will be better understood; their lives will benefit from evaluation, research and information on their needs, rights and the effectiveness of services.

Goal 3 Children will receive quality supports and services to promote all aspects of their development.

Objectives under Goal 1

Under Goal 1, with which this research is concerned, six objectives were identified as necessary to achieve the fulfilment of the goal, namely:

1. To put in place new mechanisms in the public sector which achieve participation by children in matters which affect them.
2. To promote and support the development of a similar approach in the voluntary and private sectors.
3. To ensure that children are made aware of their rights and responsibilities.
4. To support children and organisations to make the most of the new opportunities to be provided.
5. To target additional resources and supports to enable marginalised children to participate equally.
6. To support research into and evaluation of new mechanisms to give children a voice.

1.2 Methodology

In accordance with the tender received from the Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (now the Department of Children and Youth Affairs), the aim of this research was to undertake a review of the evidence concerning the extent to which Goal 1 has been implemented during the 10 years of the National Children's Strategy – from 2000 to 2010. In addition, the literature review was designed to facilitate conclusions on what progress had been achieved under each of the six objectives listed above.

Importantly, however, the research had two broader purposes: first, to facilitate reflection on and evaluation of what substantive progress has been achieved under Goal 1 and, secondly, to provide an evidence base for the development of a policy paper on child and young people's participation to be developed as part of the new national policy framework, now known as *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures: The National Policy Framework for Children and Young People, 2014-2020* (DCYA, 2014).

To this end, the research identified:
- developments on implementation and progress under Goal 1 of the National Children's Strategy (2000);
- challenges and gaps emerging from implementation of Goal 1;
- national and international best practice on children and young people's participation.

In order to undertake this task effectively, the analysed material was reviewed under each of the six objectives formulated under Goal 1 of the strategy. While the sub-headings of this literature and policy review attempt to provide a structure to the materials reviewed, it should be noted that many initiatives could have been placed under several different headings. In these cases, categorisation was undertaken where the best fit was identified. Furthermore, it was often difficult to decide where to draw the boundary when including materials. For example, all of the research conducted under Goal 2 of the strategy (*Children's lives will be better understood*) has contributed directly or indirectly to the implementation of Goal 1. At the same time, too broad an approach would have risked the research losing focus. Within reasonable limits, therefore, a broad approach was adopted and such materials were included; however, the emphasis was placed not on the detailed findings under each objective, but rather on the findings that emerged from the review as a whole relevant to the implementation of Goal 1 in the future. This was in line with the fact that the research aimed to identify what lessons could be learned from the developments and achievements of the past so as to ensure greater progress in the future.

Sources consulted

Materials were researched via the following sources:
- publications of the Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (OMCYA), now the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA);
- annual and other reports of relevant bodies and organisations;
- publicly available reports and evaluations of specific mechanisms, initiatives and developments;
- websites of relevant organisations across the public and voluntary sectors;
- primary and secondary research, including academic publications (mainly through the RIAN database, www.Childrensdatabase.ie and websites of research institutes and universities).

All documentation consulted is listed in the References for Sections 1-8 of the report.

1.3   Structure of report

This report is divided into 10 sections. Following this Introductory section, **Section 2** outlines the nine specific measures for action under Goal 1 of the National Children's Strategy and details the independent mid-term review of the strategy, undertaken in 2006. **Sections 3-8** examine each of the six objectives in turn under Goal 1 by reviewing the relevant material, summarising the principal achievements made and identifying the learning and possible ways forward. This review also highlights case studies that present concrete examples of implementation. **Section 9** explores international trends and developments, and the report reaches its conclusions in **Section 10**.

1.4   Limitations and challenges of the national policy and literature review

This national policy and literature review was undertaken primarily and almost exclusively by means of a desk-based literature review. The scale of the project allowed for limited follow-up or interviews with those involved in various initiatives or developments under the National Children's Strategy. Although it is designed to provide a critical account of what has been achieved under Goal 1 of the strategy, it has a number of limitations. First, it does not claim to be an exhaustive audit or evaluation of every participation structure and initiative identifiable and attributable directly or indirectly to the strategy. Rather, it draws on the research to undertake a reflective analysis of what has been achieved under Goal 1 and to identify the major trends in ensuring that the voices of children and young people are heard and taken into account. Although there is now some excellent literature on the experiences of participation of organisations, institutions and children and young people themselves, this issue was largely beyond the scope of this research.

Secondly, only information publicly available and accessible could be included in the review and although it is an obvious point, it is important to note the limits that this placed on the analysis. For example, sometimes it emerged that information on children and young people's participation was not featured on an organisation's website, even if it was known, anecdotally, to be part of an organisation's culture and practice. Where possible, this was followed up with the organisation directly. Where this was ineffective or not possible, the absence of information was used to highlight the fact that not all achievements or progress on participation are being properly documented or disseminated. This shortcoming also means that those working on the implementation of Goal 1 on a daily basis – notably within the DCYA, but also in the wider public and voluntary sectors – will have a more nuanced understanding of what has been achieved than the literature perhaps presents. This is an inevitable limitation of a literature review of this kind.

Thirdly, this desk-based policy and literature review can be understood as a meta-analysis that reviews available sources, but due to its design it does not claim to establish the effectiveness, through levels of impact, of the different policies and initiatives reviewed.

Fourthly, this research was commissioned and undertaken in 2011. Although updated prior to publication to take recent developments into account, this merely served to ensure that the report accurately states the position of law and policy at 15th May 2015.

SECTION 2:
Nine Specific Measures for Action

The National Children's Strategy, 2000-2010 identified nine specific measures for action under Goal 1 (*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*). This section of the report identifies the progress made in these areas and also considers the independent mid-term review of the strategy undertaken in 2006 to assess progress achieved in its implementation.

2.1   Specific measures

Under Goal 1 of the strategy, nine specific measures were identified for concrete action to advance the goal of giving children a voice. Although some of these measures arise under one or more of the six objectives for Goal 1 (*see Section 1.1*) and are thus discussed in more depth in later sections of this report, it is important first to reflect on what specific achievements have taken place in this area.

The nine specific measures identified for concrete action under Goal 1 were:
- establishment of Dáil na nÓg;
- establishment of the Ombudsman for Children;
- development of national and local fora to ensure children's views are represented in decision-making;
- promotion of family group conferencing;
- reviewing the Guardian ad Litem Service;
- ratifying the European Convention on the Exercise of Children's Rights;
- developing a representation and complaints procedure for children in care;
- producing a discussion paper on the age of consent to medical treatment;
- undertaking Constitutional reform to underpin children's rights.

There has been progress in all of these areas either during the lifetime of the strategy or, in the case of Constitutional reform more recently:
- **Dáil na nÓg** was established in 2001 and ran every year up to 2010 and biennially since then, becoming an established event in the calendar.
- **Ombudsman for Children**: The Ombudsman for Children's Office was established by the Ombudsman for Children Act 2002. The first incumbent, Emily Logan, was appointed in 2004 and served two terms. Her successor Dr. Niall Muldoon was appointed in January 2015. The Office has played a key role in ensuring the voices of children are heard and brought to the attention of decision-makers.
- **National and local fora**: Dáil na nÓg is the most significant national forum in this area. At local level, 34 Comhairle na nÓg are now in place throughout the country, providing young people with local fora in which their voices can be heard on a variety of matters that affect them. (Since the time of writing, there are now 31 Comhairle due to reforms in Local Government.)
- **Family group conferencing** is an established part of practice in a variety of organisations that work with and for children, primarily under the framework of the Children Act 2001. In particular, family conferencing is undertaken by An Garda Síochána (within the Garda Diversion Programme), the Probation Service (Young Person's Probation) and Tusla – Child and Family Agency (formerly the HSE Children and Family Services).
- **Guardian ad Litem Service**: Guidance on the role, criteria for appointment, training and qualifications of Guardians ad Litem appointed in proceedings under the Child Care Act 1991 was published by the Children Acts Advisory Board in 2009. No

measures have been taken to formalise the service or to place it on a statutory footing. The Child and Family Relationships Act 2015 (Section 32) inserts a new provision in the Guardianship of Infants Act 1964, empowering the Court to appoint an expert to determine and convey the child's views in proceedings concerning matters of guardianship, custody and access.

- **European Convention on the Exercise of Children's Rights**: No progress appears to have been made towards Ireland's ratification of this Council of Europe treaty, which is designed to further implement the child's right to representation and participation in legal proceedings in the family law area.[1] The enactment of Article 42A of the Constitution (*see below*) and the Children and Family Relationships Bill 2015 may assist this process.
- **Representation and complaints procedure for children in care**: Developments in this area have been ad hoc. Children in care can make complaints, although there is no statutory complaints procedure. Support and advocacy services are provided to children in care by EPIC (Empowering People in Care), an independent organisation. Children in care can also seek a remedy via the Ombudsman for Children's Office in certain cases.
- **Age of consent to medical treatment**: The Law Reform Commission published a Consultation Paper in 2010 on children and the law dealing specifically with the age of consent to medical treatment and it published a Report (*Children and the Law: Medical Treatment*) in 2011. The HSE published the National Consent Policy in May 2013, Part 2 of which deals with Children and Minors. To date, however, there has been no legislative reform of the area.
- **Constitutional reform on children's rights**: In November 2012, the people voted to amend the Constitution of Ireland to insert a new provision (Article 42A). This requires that provision be made by law for securing as far as practicable that in adoption, guardianship, custody and access proceedings in respect of a child capable of forming a view, the view of the child shall be ascertained and given due weight having regard to the age and maturity of the child. The Supreme Court rejected a challenge to the outcome of that referendum in April 2015, paving the way for the amendment to be enacted.

2.2 Independent review of the National Children's Strategy in 2006

An independent review of the National Children's Strategy was undertaken on behalf of the National Children's Advisory Council at mid-term point (NCAC, 2006). The feedback provided on Goal 1 identified the following as key successes:
- the establishment of a range of measures to promote participation by young people (particularly the Dáil na nÓg and Comhairle na nÓg structures);
- the promotion and expansion of student councils;
- the appointment of an Ombudsman for Children and the involvement of young people in that process.

Barriers and frustrations were identified as follows:
- the lack of an effective Guardian ad Litem Service;
- structures for engaging young people remain limited;
- structures have not been developed consistently across the country;
- structures are inaccessible to many young people.

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[1] See the concerns of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (2006) *Concluding Observations: Ireland*, CRC/CO/2, 29 September 2006, para 25. Available at: http://www.dcya.gov.ie/documents/unrightsofchild/ Concluding_Obs_by_UNCRC_on_Irelands_Second_Report.pdf

As a result of this independent review, a number of recommendations were made to the Office of the Minister for Children and the Secretaries General, namely:

- to ensure children and young people's active participation is accomplished by further integrating their views into the work of Central and Local Government and local agencies;
- to put processes in place as a matter of urgency to ensure children and young people are consulted appropriately on all public policies on issues that affect them. There should be recognition of the supports they will need to be fully engaged with this work and it should be linked to the process of child impact statements and child-proofing required by Goal 2;
- to ensure the Guardian ad Litem Service is fully established and the relevant legislative provisions are brought into force;
- to provide a national lead to achieve uniformity of approach by City/County Development Boards (CDBs) by developing a set of standards for all Comhairle na nÓg, drawing on experience to date and reflecting best practice;
- to ensure Comhairle na nÓg are appropriately resourced;
- to review existing models for participation within HSE areas and use the learning from these to drive a requirement for active participation by children and young people in all HSE areas;
- to ensure that the strategy and its goals are communicated to and understood by children and young people of all ages across the country and that its role in promoting the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child is more explicit;
- to extend existing mechanisms for young people to engage in debate on issues affecting them, such as access to services, medical consent, physical punishment, anti-social behaviour orders and the age of criminal responsibility;
- where possible, to harness the connections, networks and expertise of the voluntary and community sector to facilitate consultation and engagement with children and young people.

2.3 Summary

There have been developments on the action points identified in the nine specific areas under Goal 1. Indeed, some progress has been achieved in all but one area (European Convention on the Exercise of Children's Rights, although steps have been taken to enable this to progress) and significant progress has been achieved in some. It is clear from the analysis throughout this report that good progress has been achieved in the implementation of the recommendations of the independent review undertaken in 2006. In particular, notable successes have included improvements to the local structures that enable the voices of young people to be heard by decision-makers and in the range of consultations that have enabled the voices of young people to be integrated into the development of policy in key areas. Some matters, however, remain outstanding and it is worth reflecting perhaps on why progress has not been achieved or has not been achieved more universally. All of these issues are discussed in the following sections of this report.

Sections 3-8 focus on the extent to which the six objectives under Goal 1 of the National Children's Strategy have been met.

SECTION 3:
Objective 1: To put in place new mechanisms in the public sector which achieve participation by children in matters which affect them

This review has found that the vast majority of the developments that took place in this area fall under Objective 1 in that they were initiatives of mechanisms in the public sector that aim to achieve participation of children and young people in decision-making on matters that affect them.

The scope of this section of the report is broad and includes the following issues and areas:
- general developments in law and policy;
- role of the National Children's Office (NCO), Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (OMCYA) and Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA);
- role of the Ombudsman for Children's Office;
- arts and sport;
- education;
- health and social services;
- play, recreation and planning.

3.1   General developments in law and policy

The first objective under Goal 1 was to put in place new mechanisms in the public sector which achieve participation. A vital part of this process is to embed participation into the broader law and policy framework concerning children and young people.

Legal provision has been made for Goal 1 in a number of different ways and in a number of areas. First, provision has been made for the voice of children to be heard in legal proceedings that affect them in precise instances. So, for example, the importance of hearing the views of the child in care proceedings is recognised in the Child Care Act 1991, which contains a general duty to ensure that regard is had to the views of children in such proceedings. Although some progress has been made in this area (*see below*), the operationalisation of these provisions in the Courts has been hampered by the failure to put in place a national Guardian ad Litem system. Statutory provision for children to be heard in private family law proceedings was enacted in the Children Act 1997, but never commenced. More recently, the Children and Family Relationships Act 2015 has made provision for an expert to be appointed to determine and convey the child's views to the Court in proceedings concerning matters of guardianship, custody and access. Although limited in nature, this is a welcome extension to the private family law area of mechanisms to ensure the Courts hear the views of children. The right of children to be heard is most explicitly recognised in Section 96 of the Children Act 2001 with respect to criminal proceedings against those under 18 years. Research has shown that this has had limited effect in practice and that in general children do not take an active part in their criminal proceedings (Kilkelly, 2008). However, in 2015 the Judiciary developed a Bench Book designed to assist the operation of the Children Court in line with national law and policy and international children's rights standards. This should support the implementation of Section 96 in practice.

Outside of the legal system, children's right to have a say is implicit in the provision made for student councils in the Education Act 1998. Student councils are not mandatory, however, and there is no legal provision for them at all in respect of primary schools.

More generally, children's participation is a specific function of the Ombudsman for Children's Office as set out in the Ombudsman for Children Act 2002. As explained below, this has led to participation being one of the cornerstones of this Office, highlighting the merits of granting specific statutory authority in this area. Interestingly, the Child and Family Agency Act 2013 requires the Agency (i.e. Tusla – Child and Family Agency, established in 2014) to ensure that consideration is given to the views of children when planning and reviewing the provision of services and according to its website, the pending Child and Family Agency's *Strategy for the Participation of Children and Young People* aims to ensure that every time a decision is taken that directly affects a child or young person, or children and young people collectively, their views are taken into consideration in the decision-making process. The Strategy states that:

> 'A modern public service places the service user at the heart of decision-making, service planning and provision. The Child and Family Agency is committed to engaging with children, families and communities regarding the design and quality of services. The participation of children and young people is fundamental to a child-centred, rights-based approach to working with children and young people.'

Although this is a very important development, it remains to be seen to what extent children will be enabled to participate in the Agency's performance of its functions.

Finally, the people voted in November 2012 to insert children's rights into the Constitution of Ireland. This includes a specific requirement that provision be made to enable the views of children to be taken into account in judicial proceedings concerning matters of adoption, guardianship, custody and access. A legal challenge to the referendum, rejected by the Supreme Court in April 2015, delayed enactment of the provision. However, the Thirty-first Amendment of the Constitution (Children) Act 2015 was signed into law on 28th April 2015. Implementation of the legislative duties enshrined in Article 42A is now awaited.

A short review of the broad policy framework adopted since the National Children's Strategy in 2000 demonstrates that children's participation has been acknowledged at the highest political level. The 'participation goal' has been reiterated and incorporated into several major national policy instruments. On a Government-wide level, the current social partnership agreement, *Towards 2016*, reiterates the importance of the 'participation goal' and emphasizes the importance of '*ensuring access for every child and young person to appropriate participation in local and national decision-making*' (Department of An Taoiseach, 2006). Under the National Children's Strategy Sub-Programme of the National Development Plan (NDP), 2007-2013 (Government of Ireland, 2007a), funding of €60 million was allocated to participation over the time period of the NDP. The 'participation goal' is specified through the funding of Dáil na nÓg (including the website), Comhairle na nÓg and the National Children and Young People's Forum. Equally, the National Action Plan for Social Inclusion, 2007-2016 (Government of Ireland, 2007b) formulated several high-level goals on children's issues relating to health, education and homelessness, with the overall vision that '*Every child should grow up in a family with access to sufficient resources, supports and services, to nurture and care for the child, and foster the child's development and full and equal participation in society*' (*ibid*, p. 30). In relation to participation, 'child participation' is listed as one of the innovative measures, alongside other innovative concepts under the themes of community training centres, youth justice, youth at risk from drug misuse and the *Growing Up in Ireland* national longitudinal study.

The following 'participation targets' were formulated in the National Action Plan for Social Inclusion: new standards, guidelines and supports for the operation of Comhairle na nÓg by September 2007; review of the duration and frequency of Dáil na nÓg by 2008; the establishment of measures to ensure the inclusion of hard-to-reach children and young people in the above participation structures by 2008; and a report to Government in 2012 on the overall assessment of models of best practice that promote integrated, locally led, strategic planning for children's services.

More generally, the Taskforce on Active Citizenship in its 2007 report promoted the need for all citizens, including children and young people, to become involved in social and community life.

Most recently, the National Policy Framework for Children and Young People – *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* (DCYA, 2014) – identified as one of its transformational goals the duty to listen to and involve children and young people. To further this goal, the policy identifies a range of commitments, including consultation with children and young people on policies and issues that affect their lives and the development and implementation of a *National Policy on Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-making* to strengthen efforts to ensure that the children and young people, including those seldom heard, are supported to express their views and have them given due weight.

In conclusion, it is clear that from a weak starting point, the policy base supporting the participation of children and young people in matters affecting them grew steadily over the 10-year lifetime of the National Children's Strategy and this has continued since 2010. Participation as a goal has been clearly established nationally, although the mainstreaming of this across Government departments remains a challenge. Although legislative provision for participation remains relatively limited, important reforms are being proposed that would enhance implementation of child participation in decision-making. The enactment of the Constitutional amendment holds considerable potential for the realisation of this goal for children in judicial proceedings.

3.2 Role of the National Children's Office/ Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs

It is clear from the literature review that the National Children's Office, and subsequently the Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (and since 2012 the Department of Children and Youth Affairs), has been the central Government agency involved in the implementation of Goal 1. The Office has not only been at the forefront of most of the initiatives to implement Goal 1; crucially it has provided leadership to other agencies and organisations in this area, principally through collaboration on specific participation and consultation initiatives.

The establishment of the National Children's Office (NCO) in 2001, to oversee the implementation of the National Children's Strategy, represented the first major institutional innovation under the strategy. It paved the way for the development of 'a champion' of children's rights generally and children's participation more specifically. In 2005, following the promotion of the post of Junior Minister of Children to a 'super' Junior Ministry with a seat at the Cabinet table, the NCO was incorporated into the newly established Office of the Minister for Children (OMC). Following the transfer of the youth work portfolio from the Department of Education and Skills in 2008, the OMC became the Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (OMCYA). In addition to overseeing the implementation of the National Children's Strategy and coordinating Government policy on children and young people, the OMCYA was also given delegated functions in the Department of Health and Children, the Department of Education and Skills, and the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform. Following the 2011 general election, the creation of a full Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA) was a further significant step towards strengthening the children's agenda in general. The position of the Participation Unit has changed during this period; it currently falls under the Early Years and Children's Wellbeing Division of the Department.

As this review demonstrates, most of the participation structures and initiatives under Objective 1 have been initiated by or implemented in cooperation with the OMCYA (now the DCYA). It can therefore be described as a major champion of children and young people's

participation in Ireland. This is explained further in the sections that follow. The review next outlines the structures set up to ensure that the views of children and young people were incorporated directly into the work of the NCO/OMCYA.

3.3   NCO/OMCYA structures

National Children's Advisory Council

In 2001, the National Children's Advisory Council (NCAC) was set up to monitor and advise on progress of the National Children's Strategy. The NCAC has issued advice on the following areas associated with the National Children's Strategy: alcohol and young people; voice of the child; child protection; play policy; and youth volunteering. The first point mentioned under the NCAC's vision statement is to ensure that '*children and young people are fully involved and consulted, as far as possible, in all of the areas where decisions are made that affect their lives, whether that is in government, in health, in education, in leisure, in community and family life*'. Council members represent both statutory and voluntary sectors. According to the NCAC's website, three children from the National Children and Young People's Forum (NCYPF) were represented on the Council during the first period (2001-2004) and five on the second (2005-2008). The NCYPF was discontinued following the Government's Central Review of Expenditure in 2011.[2]

Undoubtedly, the participation of young people in this high-level body has produced valuable experiences in enabling the participation of children and young people, as well as useful information on the actual process and possible impact. It would be beneficial if the learning from this process could be published and made available for other organisations and agencies interested in replicating a similar structure.

The NCAC was reconstituted in 2014 following the publication of *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures*. It is charged, *inter alia*, with ensuring that the views and voice of children and young people inform the work of the Council, although it has no direct representation of that constituency.

National Children and Young People's Forum

The National Children and Young People's Forum (NCYPF) was set up in 2004 to act as a reference panel and to advise the OMCYA and the Minister on relevant issues. The Forum is made up of 35 young people, aged 12-18, recruited from local Comhairlí (each Comhairle nominates 2 representatives) and through other organisations supporting hard-to-reach young people. Members of the NCYPF are also members of the National Children's Advisory Council (*see above*). The Forum has been involved in initiatives such as:
- design and content of *Teenspace*, National Recreation Policy for Young People (2007);
- development of resources for student councils;
- evaluating tenders for relevant projects;
- health service provision for teenagers;
- the mid-term review of the National Children's Strategy (2006);
- design and content of the website on young people's events and recreation facilities (www.teenspace.ie);
- development of child/youth-friendly versions of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child;
- supporting national consultations with teenagers on alcohol misuse and mental health.

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[2]   No information was found on the NCAC after 2008.

In addition, the evaluation of the first two years of the NCYPF identified that it was successful in engaging with a small number of hard-to reach young people and that young people reported benefiting individually and collectively from their participation in the Forum (Harper, 2007). Young people also made very tangible suggestions (reflected in the evaluation report), such as the need to clarify the aims and objectives of the NCYPF, ensuring inclusiveness and equality of participation, introducing a 'buddy system' and mentoring of younger participants, and establishing clear terms of office. The evaluation also mentions that the lessons learnt from the NCYPF could be publicised in a 'How to' guide by the OMCYA.

Children and Young People's Participation Support Unit/ Children and Young People's Participation Partnership Committee

The Children and Young People's Participation Support Team was set up in 2009 by the OMCYA, mainly to provide support for the development of effective Comhairle na nÓg structures under all City/County Development Boards, as well as other initiatives/actions developed by the Children and Young People's Participation Partnership Committee. Critically, the Participation Support Team is resourced with two Regional Participation Project Officers, provided by Youth Work Ireland and Foróige.

The Children and Young People's Participation Partnership Committee replaced the Comhairle Implementation Group (CIG) and is responsible, among other things, for overseeing the 2-year Comhairle Development Plan. It is chaired jointly with the National Youth Council of Ireland. Membership includes a wide range of participants from both the statutory and voluntary sectors, as well as young people from the Dáil na nÓg Council.

Children's Advisory Forum for *Growing Up in Ireland* study

As a contribution to Goal 2 of the Children's Strategy (*Children's lives will be better understood*), the National Longitudinal Study of Children, *Growing Up in Ireland* (GUI)*, was* launched in 2006. Two representative cohorts of 9-month old infants and 9-year old children are being studied over a time period of 7 years to record and monitor various aspects relating to their well-being and experiences of growing up in Ireland. A Children's Advisory Forum (CAF) has been set up to ensure that children's voices are heard throughout the study and according to the GUI website (www.growingup.ie), the CAF advises on how best to run the study and to make sure the views and opinions of children and young people are considered when making decisions. The CAF consists of 84 children, sitting on 12 committees (each consisting of 7 boys and girls) in schools across Ireland. The schools in which these committees sit are spread across several regions, including Limerick, Cork, Westmeath, Dublin and Wicklow, chosen in order to represent all types of schools and communities. As the original membership has moved on to secondary school, there are 9 different secondary schools involved with the process.

The CAF is organised by two members of the *Growing Up in Ireland* Team and meets regularly. An external evaluator attends each meeting with a view to ensuring continuous assessment and improvement of the functioning of the CAF. Principles of the CAF are that:
- each meeting will be evaluated by adults and children alike;
- all meetings must be accessible to all participants;
- membership of the CAF is voluntary and each child has a choice in participation;
- children will be supported to participate meaningfully through training, encouragement and the support of a peer network;
- children will be given thanks and proper recognition for participation and regular feedback on their input.

So far, the CAF has provided input to the *Growing Up in Ireland* study on the design of its logo and the development of the children's questionnaire, communication materials and a children's version of the study's first major research output (report). The CAF has also been involved in the development and refinement of creative research methodologies for the qualitative element of the study.

Student Council Working Group

A Student Council Working Group was established for two years (2003-2005), chaired and managed by the former National Children's Office, in cooperation with the Department of Education and Science, to promote the establishment of democratic student councils in second-level schools. All partners in education nominated representatives to the Working Group, including 11 second-level students, aged 13-17. As a result of the Group's work, the following achievements can be listed:
- commissioning and publication of research into enablers and barriers to effective student councils (Keogh and Whyte, 2005);
- development of a resources pack for schools (NCO, 2006);
- development of a series of recommendations in final report to the Minister for Children (NCO, 2005a).

According to O'Donnell and Hanafin (2007), the involvement of young people in the Working Group was highly beneficial since '*without their involvement, the highly effective resources and the new support service might never have happened and most certainly would not have been as relevant and effective as they have proved to be*'.

The major recommendation of the Working Group to establish a Student Council Support Service was fulfilled through its establishment in September 2007 as part of the Second-level Support Service. The OMCYA and the Department of Education and Science (at the time) co-funded a website for the Service, with a range of resources and materials for those setting up or operating a student council. It is available at www.studentcouncil.ie.

3.4 Consultations with children and young people

It is widely acknowledged that children and young people have important contributions to make to the development of national policy on a wide range of issues. The OMCYA has spearheaded consultations with children and young people on a number of issues of national importance, often in cooperation with other agencies and organisations. These have included (O'Donnell and Hanafin, 2007):
- development of *National Play Policy* (2003);
- development of *Children's Code of Advertising* (2004);
- development of *National Recreation Policy* (2005);
- development of a *National Set of Child Well-being Indicators* (2005);
- development of *Taskforce on Active Citizenship* (2006);
- children's views on the *Age of Consent for Sexual Activity* (2006);
- development of *Irish Youth Justice Strategy* (2007);
- children's views on the *Misuse of Alcohol among Young People* (2007);
- children's views on *Teen Mental Health* (2008);
- children's views on the development of the new National Paediatric Hospital (2009);
- children's views on *Children in the care of the State* (January – December 2010);
- review of the *Junior Cycle in second-level schools* (2010);
- children's views on *White Paper on Crime* (2010);

- consultations with children and young people for the National Children and Young People's Policy Framework, 2012-2017 (now known as *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures*) (2011);
- consultations with children and young people for the *Forum on Patronage and Pluralism in Primary Schools* (2011);
- *Young Voices* consultations with young people for Ireland's EU Presidency on social inclusion in the youth sector (January and February 2013);
- consultations with young people on the *Transition to Third-level Education* (October 2013);
- *Young Voices* consultations with young people as part of the EU Structured Dialogue process on employment and training (January and February 2014).

Case Study 1: Consultation on the Misuse of Alcohol among Young People (2007)

In 2007, the OMCYA spearheaded the consultation among young people on the misuse of alcohol. The preparation and the consultation process were led by the OMCYA's National Children and Young People's Forum, making it a youth-led process. 257 young people aged 12-18 were involved in the consultation process in 5 different locations. Young people were asked to contribute their views on possible solutions to alcohol misuse, with the following issues emerging as their top recommendations: lowering of the legal age of drinking to 16 years; offering alternative alcohol-free facilities; role of parents; age-appropriate education programmes; and a updated and enforced ID system. Findings were published in the OMCYA's (2008b) report entitled *Teenagers' views on solutions to alcohol misuse: Report on a National Consultation*.

Case Study 2: Consultation on Teen Mental Health (2008)

In 2008, 277 young people, aged 12-18 were consulted in 5 different locations across the country on youth mental health issues. Young people identified the following key themes as factors affecting their mental health – self-image, school pressures, family, bullying, death, peer pressure, and relationships with boyfriends and girlfriends. Six areas were considered by young people as 'supporting' strategies for positive mental health, including the school environment, facilities for young people, supports for young people, relationships with boyfriends and girlfriends, self-image and family. The consultation also identified that youth cafés or other safe spaces were paramount to young people's quality of life and mental health. Some issues, such as tattooing and piercing, were not considered as mental health issues.

Two reports were published on this important consultation (OMCYA, 2008b and 2009a). Both highlight that the breadth of issues emerging is relevant to policy-makers, practitioners and educators, and it is hoped that the findings will be taken into consideration 'when relevant'. A direct output from this consultation was a media campaign launched in 2009 on teen mental health, which featured a TV/cinema advertisement, outdoor advertising and online campaign (www.letsomeoneknow.ie). The advertisement, called 'The boy with the hoodie', received the Taoiseach's Public Service Excellence Award and continues to be screened throughout Ireland.

General conclusions on consultations

Although it is not possible within the framework of this literature review to analyse each consultation process in detail, several important issues emerge:

- The range of topics discussed in the consultations is diverse and includes a number of very important matters with direct relevance to the lives of children and young people.
- Consultations with children and young people have taken place regularly and with increasing frequency.
- Consultations have taken place on different levels and have included consultations on sectoral strategies; specific policies aimed at children and young people; broader issues, where children and young people constitute one target group of a policy; and specific consultations with marginalised children.
- A wide range of partners, including those in the private sector, have been included in these consultations.
- The consultations employ a variety of methodologies of involving children and young people, including creative methodologies.

Overall, it is clear that through its consultation work, the OMCYA (and subsequently the DCYA) has ensured that the voices of children and young people are heard, with direct impact on national policy in a number of cases. This is an impressive achievement, which has undoubtedly had knock-on effects on the DCYA, its partners and the children and young people who were part of these processes. The extent of the direct impact of this work on the policy areas in question is the subject of a recent research report by Martin *et al* (2015).

Case Study 3: Consultation on the New Paediatric Hospital (2009)

In 2009, the OMCYA supported the Development Board of the new National Paediatric Hospital to hold consultations with children and young people on the design of the new children's hospital. A national consultation, involving approximately 100 children and young people aged 8-18, was held over 2 days and explored their perspectives on hospital design. All of the participants had direct experience of being in one of the three children's hospitals in Ireland and their suggestions were found to be extremely relevant and creative.

The Development Board also commissioned a study to explore the views of young children. 55 children, aged 5-8, with a variety of acute/chronic and medical conditions were consulted on their perspectives of physical and social hospital spaces.

As a result of these consultations, a Youth Advisory Panel has been set up and incorporated into the planning and design of the new children's hospital.

3.5 Establishment of national and local structures

The establishment of Dáil na nÓg and the development of national and local fora to ensure children's views are represented in decision-making were separate action points under the nine specific measures identified for concrete action under Goal 1 of the National Children's Strategy (*see Section 2.1*). Although qualitative improvements can still be made (as highlighted by evaluations synthesised below), there has been significant progress achieved in establishing the mechanisms of Dáil na nÓg at national level and Comhairle na nÓg at County Development Board level. Moreover, learning from these initiatives – primarily through their independent evaluation – combines to produce a substantial body of critical knowledge and experience on the establishment and maintenance of participation structures for children and young people at local and national levels. In particular, the evidence points to the important role of partnerships, the need to encourage involvement of hard-to-reach young

people, the importance of alternative participation mechanisms, transport issues and the establishment of non-formal/everyday spaces of youth participation.

Comhairle na nÓg

Comhairle na nÓg are local youth councils established in 2002 to provide children and young people the opportunity to be involved in the development of local services and policies. At the time of writing, there were 34 Comhairlí operating with the 34 Local Authorities and they operate with the structured support of the DCYA and others (*see below*). The Comhairlí are funded by the DCYA Comhairle na nÓg Development Fund, administered by City/County Development Boards and/or Education and Training Boards. On average, there are about 33 young people participating in each Comhairle na nÓg, which means that around 1,100 young people participate across the country on an annual basis. The gender distribution is fairly equal. The higher participation of those over 16 years was highlighted by the first evaluation of the Comhairle na nÓg Fund (McEvoy, 2009a) and has since improved, if unevenly, across the Comhairlí; an average of 41% of Comhairle members are now aged 12-15 years (McEvoy, 2011). Useful strategies to ensure participation of younger children (12-15 year-olds) have been developed (*ibid*, p. 13). However, while there appears to be consensus on focusing these initiatives on 12-18 year-olds, younger children are occasionally included. The first-ever Comhairle na nÓg, held in 2002 in Co. Wicklow, had a group of young people aged 7-12 fully involved in deliberations (albeit in a separate group).

Dáil na nÓg

The National Children's Strategy (2000) identified the establishment of Dáil na nÓg – the national youth parliament for young people aged 12-18 – as a means to '*provide a national forum where children can raise and debate issues of concern to them on a periodic basis*'. Although not very precise, the strategy considered some broad elements as foundational in the establishment of this mechanism, including proper arrangements for its operation; genuinely inclusive representation; good local networks; partnering with the education sector; and the use of multimedia.

Dáil na nÓg met annually from 2001 and biennially since 2010.[3] About 200 young people participate in the Dáil na nÓg event to discuss and vote on issues that affect their lives, for example, on education, mental health issues (e.g. exam pressures, bullying, body image, depression and suicide), sexual health, road safety, exercise and sport. Delegates from Comhairle na nÓg are elected to represent their local area at the national Dáil na nÓg event. In addition, each Comhairle na nÓg elects a delegate for the Comhairle na nÓg National Executive (formerly the Dáil na nÓg Council), which carries out the decisions taken at Dáil na nÓg and meets on a monthly basis in Dublin.

The role of the Comhairle na nÓg National Executive is:
- to identify key areas of work from the top recommendations agreed at Dáil na nÓg;
- to conduct research into the issues identified;
- to meet with relevant Ministers, TDs, Government officials, policy-makers and other stakeholders to seek their support in making changes for young people on the issues identified;
- to feed back to their Comhairle na nÓg on the work of the National Executive;
- to represent Dáil na nÓg at conferences and other events.

These mechanisms have undergone significant evolution and fine-tuning since their inception and have been evaluated on a number of occasions (e.g. Parkes, 2003; McEvoy, 2009a and 2011).

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3   For further information, see http://www.comhairlenanog.ie/dail-na-nog/

Dáil na bPáistí

Dáil na bPáistí, the national children's parliament for children aged 8-12, was held for the first time on a pilot basis in 2004. Four regional sessions took place in Dublin, Cork, Galway and Sligo, and were organised by the ISPCC on behalf of the NCO. Approximately 150 children were selected for participation through their Comhairle na nÓg. Children discussed issues of education and drug/alcohol misuse. The events were described as successful and they confirmed the value of participation by children of this age. As children had particularly strong views on education issues, a meeting was organised with the Minister for Education and Science, Mary Hanafin, TD, in 2005.

From the reviewed literature, it was not possible to identify why the Dáil na bPáistí was discontinued. Since the participation of younger children is a current concern in participation structures, it would be interesting to revisit any available learning on the challenges associated with this initiative.

Reviews, developments and lessons learned

A thorough first independent review of both the Dáil na nÓg and the Comhairle na nÓg mechanisms was commissioned by the National Children's Office (NCO) in 2005, resulting in the following key findings: the need for recognition of Comhairle na nÓg and Dáil na nÓg as the official structures for the participation of young people in strategy and policy development; the need for a systematic funding and capacity-building strategy for all Comhairlí since they were functioning to very different degrees at the time; the strengthening of interagency relationships at both national and local level, with County Development Boards as the lead partner; and the need to support the capacity of statutory and voluntary organisations to promote youth participation (NCO, 2005b, pp. 16-17).

To take the findings of the review a step further towards implementation, a Comhairle na nÓg Implementation Group (CIG) was set up by the OMCYA in June 2006 with a membership of 17 statutory and voluntary organisations, including that of young people through the Dáil na nÓg Council. Their deliberations resulted in a report to the Minister for Children in 2007 calling for a wide range of reforms, which mostly related to the resourcing and governance of the Comhairle na nÓg (CIG, 2007).

In 2009, the CIG was replaced by the Young People's Participation Partnership Committee, which has strategic oversight over the Children and Young People's Participation Support Team at the OMCYA. It has the same membership as the CIG. At the same time, the OMCYA addressed the challenges of lack of systematic funding and capacity-building of the Comhairle na nÓg, through the setting up of a Comhairle na nÓg Development Fund. It operated in the form of a grant scheme for the periods of 2007-2008 and 2009-2010. The two independent evaluations of the Comhairle na nÓg Development Fund demonstrate that this dedicated fund has made a tangible difference to the individual Comhairle na nÓg structures (McEvoy, 2009a and 2011). They further provide interesting insights into the impacts of young people's participation and lessons learnt, as well as remaining gaps and challenges, which have been drawn upon further below.

At national level, the Dáil na nÓg Steering Committee is chaired and administered by the DCYA. Its membership is made up of members of the DCYA Participation Team, the NYCI, Foróige, Youth Work Ireland, the Student Council Support Service, County Development Boards and young people from the Dáil na nÓg Council. The young Councillors take part in the Steering Committee on an equal footing with adults.

The OMCYA has described this as an example of young people sharing power and responsibility with adults: '*Power and responsibility is shared in deciding on changes, developments and improvements and the young people are aware that they are accountable to their peers for the recommendations they make and decisions they take*' (O'Donnell and Hanafin, 2007).

Dáil na nÓg/Comhairle na nÓg is supported by the Children and Young People's Participation Support Team at the DCYA. A Young People's Participation Partnership Committee, comprised of a wide range of voluntary and statutory actors, including young people (through the Dáil na nÓg Council), has strategic oversight. Since 2003, the National Youth Council of Ireland (NYCI) is responsible for organising/implementing it in cooperation with the DCYA; in 2006, Foróige and Youth Work Ireland joined this partnership. The latter two organisations also provide preparatory sessions for delegates at local level. Comhairle na nÓg Council members are also advised and supported throughout the year by dedicated advisors from these two organisations, based in the DCYA. On a local level, the City/County Development Boards and in some places the Education and Training Boards are responsible for the Comhairle. Schools and local youth clubs and initiatives are invited to nominate young people for participation. On every level, therefore, this group of initiatives represents an excellent example of partnership between the statutory and voluntary sectors in facilitating the participation of children and young people in decisions that affect them. Since 2009, the DCYA has employed three regional Children and Young People's Participation Officers, from two national youth organisations (Foróige and Youth Work Ireland), to support Comhairle na nÓg. DCYA evaluations have reported positive feedback from local Comhairle na nÓg Coordinators on the impact that these Participation Officers have had on the work of local Comhairle na nÓg (McEvoy, 2011).

Challenge of inclusion

Apart from gender and age, it is difficult to identify the other details of children and young people who participate either in Dáil na nÓg or Comhairle na nÓg. The yearly evaluation of Dáil na nÓg (e.g. OMCYA, 2008a), based on completed evaluation forms and conversations with young delegates, does not establish a detailed profile of young people who participate. However, given the fact that the majority of young people are recruited to Comhairle na nÓg through schools – 70% in 2009/2010 (McEvoy, 2011, p. 2) – and that *'there is a tendency for schools to nominate a particular type of young person'* (McEvoy, 2009a, p. 20), this remains a challenge to these civic participation mechanisms and potentially limits their social inclusiveness. In this context, the first evaluation report of Comhairle na nÓg (McEvoy, 2009a) suggested that alternative civic participation mechanisms should be considered for young people who might not be interested in the Dáil/Comhairle structures. It goes on to recommend that less formal, less structured and more 'open spaces' should be made available to young people who want to contribute their opinion, but in a more informal and maybe on a 'once-off' basis (*ibid*, p. 36).

The OMCYA Inclusion Programme (*see Section 7.2*) and other, individual initiatives by individual Comhairle (such as using text messages to voice certain issues) are addressing these challenges. Moreover, an increasing range of informal participation fora now exist in the voluntary/youth work sector (e.g. youth clubs, youth cafés, specialised youth projects), providing less frequently heard young people with the opportunity to express their views. It might be worthwhile to explore linking some of these initiatives – or the creation of other alternative spaces – to more formal participation structures to provide once-of opportunities to a broader range of young people to have their voices heard on matters that affect them.

The first evaluation report of the Comhairle na nÓg Council (McEvoy, 2009b) concluded that the inclusion of 'hard-to-involve' young people (i.e. seldom-heard young people) and young people who lacked the confidence to articulate their views remained a challenge to local

Comhairle, although significant efforts had been made by some Comhairle to include these groups of young people. The use of capacity-building programmes for young people (as already provided by some youth work organisations in cooperation with some Comhairle) and the use of creative participatory methodologies for making the voices of these young people heard in a forum-like Comhairle was suggested (*ibid*, p. 10-13). As a best practice example, the Roscommon Comhairle is cited: it uses a number of non-verbal methods, such as body mapping, 'Agony Aunt' letters, a walking debate and statement boards to support young people to express their voice (*ibid*, p. 10). Providing training on such methodologies might usefully address this issue more systematically across agencies and organisations.

The 2009 evaluation also noted that systematic cooperation between organisations that work with seldom-heard young people, as well as supporting these organisations' membership on steering committees, could facilitate fuller participation of this group of young people. The report includes a detailed list of a diverse range of strategies for inclusion of young people who are seldom heard and its application across all Comhairlí and other participation mechanisms could be encouraged. According to McEvoy (2011), on average 21% of young people involved in Comhairle na nÓg are from seldom-heard groups. 'Seldom heard' young people is a term used to describe young people who tend not to have many opportunities to have their voices heard, including young people with disabilities; from an economically disadvantaged or culturally different background; young people in care; lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgendered (LGBT) young people; and those from more rural backgrounds and ethnic minorities.

Most interestingly, perhaps the second evaluation of the Comhairle na nÓg structure found that the desire to profile young people with categories such as 'hard-to-reach' or 'seldom-heard' (albeit with good intentions) can be perceived as invasive by some young people and those involved with them in the Comhairle structures (McEvoy, 2011, p. 24). The evaluation therefore recommended establishing a sensitive mechanism to record the profile of Comhairle members without 'labelling' them (*ibid*, p. 19). A related finding from the 2009-2010 evaluation of the Dáil na nÓg Council suggested that the OMCYA should build on its experience of modelling excellent participation work in the future and think about ways this expertise and experience could be replicated within other organisations (Harper, 2010).

Impact

Both Dáil and Comhairle na nÓg provide mechanisms to facilitate young people to have their voices heard on matters that affect them, leading to impact on different levels. On an individual level, young people perceive that their participation in these mechanisms allows them to speak their mind on issues that are of concern to them, involves them in relevant activities and improves their skills (McEvoy, 2009a, p. 8). On a structural level, the research shows that nearly half of all Comhairlí (48%) have young people represented on decision-making bodies (McEvoy, 2011, p. 34). The ongoing development of a roadmap to develop strong and direct links between local Children and Young People's Services Committees and Comhairle na nÓg in each City/County Development Board is a very important initiative that has the potential to embed children and young people's participation at a local level. This would be a significant achievement in the implementation of Goal 1 of the National Children's Strategy, especially at local level.

Where young people enjoy effective access to local decision-making structures, the impact can be significant. A few examples include the establishment of recreational facilities (e.g. skate parks, youth cafés), health facilities (e.g. a local STI clinic) and contributing to fora benefiting entire communities (e.g. joint policing committees). (For a full list, please see McEvoy, 2011, pp. 30-32.) On a national level, recent Dáil na nÓg Councils have contributed to tangible outcomes, such as the rolling-out of the cervical cancer vaccine; surveying (through the local Comhairle) young people's experience of Relationships and Sexuality

Education (RSE) within schools; giving presentations to two Oireachtas Committees on Health, to the Joint Managerial Body of secondary schools and to the annual conference of the National Association of Principals and Deputy Principals. Notably, this was the first time ever that young people made presentations to these bodies and further progress has continued since.[4] When policy-makers from these bodies were asked how they viewed young people's inputs, their responses were uniformly positive, highlighting that young people's voices were under-utilised in their respective areas. They also pointed out some shortcomings, such as the high turnover of young people ('*new faces every year*'), young people's lack of access to key personnel in different agencies and the lack of follow-up on issues, taking pressure away from those in charge of making changes.

Case Study 4: Comhairle-led advocacy (2009-2010)

The *Cork Evening Echo* attended and covered all three events that Cork City Comhairle na nÓg held during 2009-2010. Three radio stations also announced the Comhairle's 'Summer Celebration' event during their 'Community' slots. LIFE FM then conducted a 30-minute interview with two Comhairle members, who highlighted the previous work of Comhairle na nÓg and Dáil na nÓg, as well as members' views and experiences of the issues that affect young people. Another radio interview was held with a different Comhairle member, who spoke about Comhairle na nÓg and the *Mental Health Services Directory* that Cork City Comhairle has been working on. Verbal feedback from young people indicates that this use of the media has greatly helped to highlight the profile of Comhairle na nÓg in Cork City.

Case Study 5: Comhairle na nÓg and local development (2003)

In 2003, the Dublin City Comhairle na nÓg focused on the review of the Dublin City Development Plan 1999 and the preparation of a new Dublin City Development Plan 2005-2011. Over 500 young people aged 7-17 from primary and secondary schools, youth groups, disability and minority ethnic groups attended the six area seminars. The Comhairle seminars involved a series of workshops on particular themes. The young people used drama, artwork, crafts and discussions to formulate their ideas for the Dublin City Development Plan. The themes discussed were transportation, infrastructure, community development, open space and recreation.

Case Study 6: Dáil na nÓg Council-led research on RSE/SPHE curricula (2009)

The Dáil na nÓg Council evaluation (Harper, 2010) reports on a peer-to-peer research project undertaken by Council members in May and June 2009. They conducted informal surveys about Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) with their schoolmates and fellow-Comhairle na nÓg members. Although details such as population size or research process could not be found, the evaluation notes that the results of the peer-to-peer survey revealed stark differences to a study conducted by the Crisis Pregnancy Agency in 2007, which concluded that 40% of schools were 'high implementers' of RSE, 36% were 'moderate implementers' and only 24% were 'low implementers'. The informal research by the Dáil na nÓg Council, on the other hand, claimed that implementation of RSE was perceived as 'very low' by the great majority of their peers.

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[4] Details of recent initiatives, including the 2014 National Showcase, can be found at http://www.comhairlenanog.ie/

The Council's informal research was then followed up by commissioning a researcher who devised two formal surveys – one on implementation of SPHE for the Junior Cycle and one on RSE for the Senior Cycle. Council members were trained and subsequently conducted the surveys at their local Comhairle meetings. Individual in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with young people were also held. The findings of this study were published in the report *Life skills matter – Not just points* (OMCYA, 2010a). The results of the informal study were confirmed: almost three-quarters of Senior Cycle students had not received any RSE classes in 2009.

Among many other findings (related to teaching methods, teachers, content, etc), the report demonstrated that 86% of students at Junior Cycle level were not involved in designing their school's SPHE policy. At Senior level, 98% of students reported that they were not involved in designing their school's RSE policy. These findings also correspond with other academic research. Recommendations formulated as a result of the Council's study were very tangible, such as a recommendation to make RSE mandatory and place a greater emphasis on relationship and sexuality issues.

This is a good example of how peer-to-peer research can offer valuable and highly accurate insights into relevant issues of concern to young people.

Learning and way forward

The present review confirms that the OMCYA (now the DCYA) is clearly spearheading the agenda for children and young people's participation through a variety of structures and initiatives and across a range of issues. There has been substantial progress in the establishment of local structures that facilitate young people's engagement with decision-makers on matters that affect them and the importance of providing dedicated resources and supports to these structures is clear. Learning also shows that efforts must continue to focus on ensuring that these structures are as inclusive and as relevant to as wide a range of young people as possible. Although the operation of Comhairle na nÓg and Dáil na nÓg has been subjected to independent evaluation, there is a case to be made for a more systematic review of the outcomes achieved by both bodies.

It is also clear that the OMCYA (now the DCYA) has partnered with a range of organisations and agencies to ensure the voices and perspectives of children and young people are taken into account in policy-making and service delivery and design as appropriate. The views and experiences of children and young people have been recorded, using a variety of innovative methodologies, and brought to the attention of decision-makers and the public at large through its official publications and dissemination (in print and online). A huge body of experience and knowledge has thus been built up both within the DCYA and among relevant staff in its partner organisations, as well as among the young people who have no doubt benefited from involvement in these initiatives. The tangible impact of all these initiatives is less clear and attempts should be made to undertake systematic tracking of the influence of these consultations on decision-making.

In light of the review, the following issues might also be worthy of consideration:
- Consideration should be given to maximising the DCYA's knowledge and experience by communicating it more effectively to others who work with and for children and young people. The review found that the communications strategy of the former OMCYA does not do justice to its impressive achievements nor are the lessons to be learned from its extensive experience, especially through the various participation structures and consultations outlined above, sufficiently public. On a related note, it could be observed that reflexivity (at least for the outside reader/learner/researcher),

including those interested to replicate similar structures or initiatives, remains under-communicated.

- As a next step, the DCYA should consider establishing a 'one-stop-shop' to support organisations seeking to involve children and young people in their work. This mechanism could provide organisations with access to user-friendly materials, training opportunities and advice and support on how to involve children in strategic decision-making, planning and other aspects of participation. The DCYA is well placed to re-package its achievements so as to identify clearly the lessons learned from its work and position itself more effectively as the central agency and resource centre in this area.

- Although consultation with children and young people has been extensive on a variety of issues, it has not been mainstreamed into policy-making on all levels; there is no statutory requirement across Government departments in this area and Ireland now lags behind its neighbours in this regard. This becomes evident when looking at areas such as planning, transport and public health (except teenage mental health and misuse of alcohol), which have not been covered by consultations with children. Preparation of the *Transport Policy, 2009-2011*, for example, did not involve consultation with children and young people, nor did the development of the *Strategy on Children and Youth Strategy, 2012-2014* by An Garda Síochána. This points to a need to mainstream the practice of incorporating the perspectives of children and young people into policy-making.

- In addition to formal mechanisms that could encourage this, it is important to consider how to raise awareness among those who work with and for children of the benefits of consulting with them on matters that affect them and on involving them as appropriate in their work. Consideration might be given in this context to developing a Quality Mark to identify those organisations and bodies that are taking active steps to involve children and young people in their work.

- A very dense body of knowledge and experience has been accumulated through the execution of the Dáil/Comhairle initiatives over the lifetime of the strategy and since, and this learning could be synthesised and strategically applied to other initiatives and across agencies. A related finding from the 2009-2010 evaluation of the Dáil na nÓg Council suggests that the DCYA could build on its experience of modelling excellent participation work in the future and think about ways this expertise and experience could be replicated within other organisations (Harper, 2010, p. 26).

- The current development and implementation of a roadmap aimed at ensuring the institutionalisation of each Comhairle in their respective City/County Development Board through the creation of direct linkages to local Children and Young People's Services Committees could represent a significant advance for children and young people's participation at local level. It is to be strongly encouraged.

- Many young people (as identified in, for example, the most recent Dáil na nÓg Delegate Report) express their frustration at not being heard at national level by those in power and note their lack of interest in providing meaningful answers and taking sufficient time to talk to young people at the event (OMCYA, 2010b, pp. 22-27). This seems to stem from the fact that it is challenging to hold professionals and policy-makers accountable to a body like Dáil na nÓg. It is possible that law reform, such as the lowering of the voting age proposed by the Constitutional Convention in 2014, is necessary to address this issue, although consideration should be given to adopting a legal duty on all Government departments to consult with children and young people in matters that affect them. Leadership at the highest level in Government is required to ensure this imperative is taken seriously.

3.6   Ombudsman for Children's Office

Although the Ombudsman for Children's Office (OCO) had not yet been established when the National Children's Strategy was adopted in 2000, the OCO has become a key advocate both for the voices of children and for child participation more generally. The OCO has undertaken a number of important consultations with children and young people and has also created structures to ensure that children and young people are involved in its work. In this regard, it has contributed significantly to the implementation of Goal 1 of the National Children's Strategy, notably under Objective 1.

The OCO was set up through the Ombudsman for Children Act 2002, which obliges the OCO to consult children and young people and highlight their concerns in executing its three main functions:
- independent complaints handling;
- policy and legislation advice;
- promotion of children's rights through participation and education.

Each of the OCO's functions contributes to children and young people's participation in matters relevant to their lives and accordingly the OCO's activities are mentioned at several points throughout this review. Children participated in the OCO from the very start: 15 children and 3 adults were involved in the open recruitment process for the position of Ombudsman by sitting on the interview panel. This process was repeated when the new Ombudsman was recruited in 2015.

OCO Youth Advisory Panel

The OCO's main administrative participation mechanism, the Youth Advisory Panel (YAP), was set up in 2004, with the commencement of the OCO's work. The YAP consists of a group of young people who advise the Office on the shape and work of the organisation. Since 2004, two such panels have been in existence and the focal point for all YAP activities is the OCO Participation Team. The OCO published a booklet in 2008 entitled *The Story of the Ombudsman's Youth Advisory Panel* and it provides detailed insight into the Office's experience with the YAP structure, the impacts of which are described as developing the OCO's knowledge bank, providing fresh perspectives, enhancing the OCO's credibility, increasing the OCO's capacity and efficiency, and energising staff (OCO, 2008a). The main impacts on young people participating in the YAP were identified by YAP members as the opportunity to work for change, the opportunity to learn, the opportunity to meet new people and to make new friends.

In more detail, the OCO's booklet on the YAP documents the lessons learnt from the different activities of the YAP, such as recruitment, communicating with children and young people, supporting other children and young people to participate, facilitating workshops and making presentations. It also emphasizes that activity-based participation was found to be most useful (*ibid*, pp. 13-14) and notes that participation, although part of a systematic process, always consists of concrete actions. It also highlights that different levels of participation are appropriate at different stages: children and young people are sometimes involved as equal partners, sometimes as ambassadors, sometimes as advisors (e.g. through the Big Ballot). Sometimes, it was also found appropriate that although children and young people are consulted on research, they might not necessarily be involved in deciding how to proceed further. On the other hand, they are involved as full partners (designing and planning and sometimes even participating in the implementation) in activities that directly involve children and young people (*ibid*, p. 12).

The OCO's booklet on the YAP also shares best practice gained in terms of size of the panel (25 young people), length of time on the panel (2 years), age range of young people (12-17)

and diversity and inclusiveness of the panel. Here, it is noteworthy that although the initial applications to the YAP (199 in total) came from a diverse range of backgrounds, including seldom-heard young people (e.g. from the care system or asylum-seekers), the OCO had to – after the peer selection process of 17 young people – nominate some additional young people to ensure the YAP's diversity (*ibid*, pp. 18-20). The planning and recruitment process of the panel was admittedly resource-intensive, lasting 9 months in total (from planning to setting-up of the panel), and involved a systematic awareness-raising campaign, including radio ads, promotion in schools, youth clubs and the Internet. It was found that schools offered the most effective recruitment channel. The actual peer voting was organised through 5 half-day peer selection events. Some young people found it challenging to participate in peer-voting because they had never done anything like it before (*ibid*, p. 20). Other practical issues described in detail in the booklet concerned safety (the importance of clear communication with guardians) and travel (YAP members' and a guardian's travel and subsistence to meetings must be provided for).

The OCO's booklet on the YAP also documents challenges encountered in the YAP process, such as managing expectations, diversity and inclusiveness, involving younger children, even geographical spread and the challenge to combine young people's interests and strategic priorities of the Office (*ibid*, pp. 28-3). Similarly, the following factors were listed as learning outcomes: the importance of in-house preparation; clear communication to everybody involved; proper procedures and policies in place, and participation of young people who are keen to participate (*ibid*, p. 35). Finally, YAP members were asked about their recommendations on recruiting a panel and findings included, among others, that young people were concerned with ensuring diversity; having a close enough age range with others on the panel; having access to the right kind of information to understand what the panel is about; and a fair and democratic way to select panel members.

Of final interest is the point that the YAP structure is improved through informal and ongoing evaluation with young people. Every six months, time is dedicated in the YAP meetings to reflect on current learning and challenges, and these are acted upon accordingly.

OCO complaints mechanism

The OCO complaints procedure provides children with the opportunity to make their voice heard by bringing matters that concern them to the attention of the Ombudsman for Children's Office. The scale of complaints made to the Office (in 2013 alone, the Office dealt with over 1,500 complaints) makes clear that this is a particularly important avenue of redress for children and young people (OCO, 2013). Two specific publications have been produced aimed at helping children and young people and the public more generally understand the Office's investigations function and the complaints procedure – *A Guide to Complaint Handling by the Ombudsman for Children's Office* (OCO, 2008b) and *A Guide to Investigations by the Ombudsman for Children's Office* (OCO, 2009b).

What Children Care About

The OCO has summarised and published an overview of issues raised with the Office and the main learning from listening to young people during 2007 and 2008 was published in two reports entitled *Issues Raised by Children* and *What Children Care About* (*see* http://www.oco.ie/publications/direct-work-with-children-and-young-people/). Children's views are summarised under the headings of alternative care; discrimination; law; language, culture and heritage; education; employment; family; health; housing; information; play, leisure and recreation; standard of living; safety and protection; voice and being heard. The issues raised under these headings are expressing individual children's concerns raised with the OCO, many of them being also relevant for all children.

Examples of where children did not feel that their voices were heard included:

- **Family Law**: Children felt upset that their views were not taken into account in family court situations/by the judge (different issues relating to parents' separation).
- **Alternative care:** Changes in care arrangements and lack of consultation.
- **Education:** Children not feeling heard in schools where no student council existed in their school.
- **Young people in society:** Many young people (particularly those in care) feeling that they do not have a voice in society.
- **Safety in the community**: Children feeling that they live in unsafe communities.
- **Involvement in community decision-making:** Children asking where to turn in the local community to make their voices heard.

OCO Big Ballot

In November 2007, the OCO conducted the *Big Ballot* – the largest ever national poll of children in Ireland. During the poll, over 75,000 children from 500 schools and education centres (Youthreach and Traveller Centres) voted on what mattered most to them. The five issues on which the children voted were education; having a voice; play and recreation; family and care; and health, wealth and material well-being.

In addition to the poll, the Ombudsman and her team toured more than 30 participating schools to listen to what children and young people had to say on the issues. The results of the poll were communicated back to schools. The issue of family and alternative care topped the poll and the OCO adopted the issue as a strategic priority for the Office.

During 2007, as part of the preparation for the *Big Ballot*, the OCO met with a range of groups of children and young people, including children in care, children living in areas of deprivation and children from ethnic minority backgrounds. As part of this consultation, the OCO met with a group of separated children and many of the issues they raised were a cause of concern to the Office.

Specific consultations

The Ombudsman for Children has also undertaken a number of direct consultations with children and young people in recent years. These included:

- *All I have to say – Separated children in their own words* (OCO, 2010a);
- *Separated Children living in Ireland: A Report by the Ombudsman for Children's Office* (OCO, 2010b);
- *Young People in St. Patrick's Institution: A Report by the Ombudsman for Children's Office* (OCO, 2011);
- *Dealing with Bullying in Schools: A Consultation with Children and Young People* (OCO, 2012).

These consultations have played an important role in bringing into the public domain the experiences, views and perspectives of children not often heard. They have helped to advocate for change and reform – for example, the report on the views of young people in St. Patrick's Institution was influential in bringing about the Government's commitment in 2012 to remove all those under 18 years from this prison-like environment. This is a particularly good example of how children and young people can be enabled to bring their views to the attention of decision-makers.

Learning and way forward

The OCO is an interesting case study for looking at children and young people's participation both within the organisation and beyond it as a model for other agencies and institutions that work with children and young people. A number of conclusions can be drawn. First, the achievements of the OCO show how a mandate, anchored in legislation, can be internalised and embedded in the working culture of an organisation. In the OCO example, making children's voices heard has become visible at all levels of the organisation, not only because of the commitment of staff to participation as a working method, but also because this is one of the Office's statutory functions. The second reason why the work of the OCO is important in this context is that the Office appears as an organisation in learning mode, continuously reflecting on its practice and sharing this reflection process with a general audience (e.g. via its website, but also through the publication and dissemination of its work). While other institutions have equally valuable and indeed richer experiences with children and young people's participation, the OCO's strategy to make its learning explicit and accessible to a general audience is highly commendable. The communication structure makes all of its resources extremely useful for interested parties who want to learn something about specific issues, but also on participation structures and processes.

Notwithstanding the complementary nature of their work in child participation, there appears to be little formal connection between the work of the DCYA and the OCO. While it is important to recognise the independent function of the Ombudsman for Children's Office, consideration should be given to take account of the OCO's participation work in the development and implementation of the National Participation Strategy.

3.7   Arts and sport

The Arts Council

Of all the separate statutory agencies whose work affects and involves children and young people, the Arts Council has been most innovative in pursuit of Goal 1 of the National Children's Strategy. In 2005, the Arts Council reflected in its policy for young people and the arts that youth participation in the arts was beneficial not just for young people themselves, but also because of what young people contribute to this area.

The policy document highlighted the need for the Arts Council to prioritise measures that are cross-cutting and that advance the development of a sustainable infrastructure for the youth arts sector. It included four priorities, as follows:
* identify a structure or structures to provide the sustained support and development of the full spectrum of youth arts practices in Ireland;
* ensure an adequate supply of trained and supported adults for the sector;
* produce a Code of Ethics and Good Practice for Arts Practices with children and young people (these were published in 2009 – *see* Arts Council, 2009);
* redress internal weaknesses in the Arts Council in order to administer more effectively Arts Council policy regarding youth arts.

The Arts Council's strategic overview document, *Developing the Arts in Ireland, 2011-2012*, sets the wider context for the Arts Council's support of young people, children and education as follows (Arts Council, 2011, p. 9): '*Provision of high quality arts experiences for young people in and out of school is an abiding concern of the Arts Council. The high proportion of young people in our population and their developmental significance carry weight in our funding decisions and in our partnerships in the fields of arts-in-education, youth arts, and professional arts provision for young audiences.*'

Accordingly, in its strategy, the Arts Council undertook to build on the 2008 *Report of the Special Committee on Arts and Education* during 2011-2013 and to work with the Department of Education and Skills and other partners to advance the actions proposed in that report, which have the potential to make the arts more present in the lives of nearly one million young people. Part of this included a commitment to work closely with the (then) OMCYA and the NYCI.

Art-Youth-Culture: FYI

In March 2010, the Arts Council organised a 3-day event, including 60 young people between the ages of 15-25 and 36 policy-makers. Using a variety of artistic media (including music, theatre, film and visual arts), young people explored their right to participate in cultural life and the arts. The young people shared their experiences, concerns and ideas with key policy-makers and cultural providers through a day-long series of roundtable discussions and artistic presentations, the themes and format of which were determined in consultation with young people. Young people were involved in the preparation and shaping of the agenda for the meeting, in the workshops taking place during the event, in organising the consultation with policy-makers, and in all other associated activities related to the organisation and running of the initiative.

Recommendations emerging from the event, voiced by young people, included the following (Arts Council, 2010, pp. 45-48):

- **Develop a youth advisory committee to the Arts Council**, comprising representatives from a range of youth arts programmes nationwide that might meet with relevant members of Arts Council staff and at least one Council member to provide input into the ongoing development of young people's arts; respond to specific Arts Council initiatives, as well as propose new initiatives; invite professional youth arts practitioners to assist in facilitating youth advisory committee meetings and ancillary activities; ensure the process is relevant and engaging for a diverse group of young people; and facilitate a creative process that draws on best practice in youth arts.
- **Develop a pool of young critics/experts**, the members of which might report to the Arts Council on a range of youth arts activities nationwide and assist in the assessment process for relevant Arts Council schemes and awards.
- **Support the development of youth-led advocacy initiatives** in the arts by offering an open, responsive door to such initiatives and facilitating access to information, networking opportunities and media attention for such groups, as appropriate.
- **Ensure Arts Council-funded organisations providing programmes for children and young people have appropriate practices in place** to enable young people to provide input and feedback regarding the provision and development of programmes targeted towards them.
- **Work with the National Youth Council of Ireland and Local Authority Arts Officers** to foster and develop relationships between Local Arts Offices and local Comhairle na nÓg.

Case Study 7: Arts Council and Young Ensembles Scheme

The Young Ensemble Scheme provides funding for groups of young people between the ages of 12 and 23 to create ambitious and original work together in any art form (e.g. circus, dance, digital media, film, music, theatre, literature, visual arts or any combination of the above). The funding guidelines are made more accessible through a YouTube video and through a Twitter listing on funding-related tweets.

Irish Sports Council

Like the Arts Council, a similarly important statutory agency is the Irish Sports Council. It developed a Participation Strategy as part of its *Statement of Strategy, 2009-2011* (continued into its most recent strategy covering 2012-2014), identifying key objectives to encourage greater participation in sport by adults and children (Irish Sports Council, 2009). The main mission of the strategy is to '*foster and encourage a culture of active participation, supporting opportunities for and access to sport and physical activity*'. The primary mechanism to achieve this mission is to work with the Local Sports Partnership network to implement and deliver projects and interventions at local level within communities. However, the strategy does not clarify how children and young people's participation in decision-making will be facilitated. It is also not evident how Local Sports Partnerships encourage children and young people beyond mere participation, but also extend their participation in decision-making. A more extensive review might have uncovered more initiatives in the Irish Sports Council, and more particularly among its many member organisations. The case study that follows is one such example.

> **Case Study 8: The Irish Sports Council's Girls Active Programme**
>
> The Girls Active Programme aims to increase the number of teenage girls involved in long-term regular physical activity through developing more supportive environments for teenage girls' physical activity in schools. Among others, the good practice principles of the
> Girls Active Programme include:
> * was developed from a consultation with girls;
> * involves the girls in choosing and organising their own activities;
> * links with activities available in the community;
> * caters for more diverse needs than traditional extra-curricular sports.

In view of the success of this programme for teenage girls, the good practice principles identified have been used to devise other local programmes such as Active 8 and Girls in Action, which roll out through the network of Local Sports Partnerships supported by the Women in Sport initiative of the Irish Sports Council. It is important that these initiatives are underpinned by the views and perspectives of young people from the outset.

Learning and way forward

The reach of both the Arts Council and the Irish Sports Council is extremely wide and in both cases, especially the latter, membership organisations have contact with large numbers of children and young people locally and nationally of all ages and backgrounds. It is not clear, however, whether the participation of children and young people (in the sense of their participation in decision-making as opposed to in art or sport activities) is central to the work of either organisation.

Consideration should thus be given to how to ensure that the relevance of Goal 1 to both these organisations – and all other agencies beyond Government departments – is made clear. Integration of the Goal 1 objectives into the organisations' strategic plans should be a priority, while they would also benefit from the DCYA's expertise on how to engage children and young people more fully in their work. Consideration should also be given to how to integrate participation into existing structures. For example, given that the Local Sports Partnerships also operate along City/County Development Board lines (like the Comhairle na nÓg structures), consideration should be given to exploring collaboration between these bodies. Similar linkages should be pursued with the Arts Council.

3.8 Education

Children and young people spend a large proportion of their time in schools, both at primary and secondary levels. It is essential for the implementation of Goal 1 that the participation of children and young people in decision-making is embedded in the school environment and in education systems more generally. This section considers the extent to which this has taken place in Ireland during the lifetime of the National Children's Strategy (2000-2010).

Education issues

Education-related issues feature highly among children and young people's concerns. In the 2010 Dáil na nÓg session, for example, young people voted 'Equality of access to education' and 'Mental health' as the two themes to be discussed. With regard to the education topic, the key issues raised by young people were:
- the costs of second- and third-level education;
- young people having a say in education;
- exam pressures;
- transport to and from education.

The top 3 recommendations voted on by delegates at the Dáil na nÓg session were that:
- The Department of Education should lengthen the Leaving Certificate cycle to 3 years and reduce the Junior Certificate cycle to 2 years.
- A national book rental scheme should be available to all secondary schools, with a standard fee for all students.
- Classes on motivation, confidence-building and exam pressure should be integrated into the school curriculum and administered by a party external to the school.

More specifically with regard to young people having a say in education, the Dáil na nÓg delegates expressed the view that the majority of student councils are unable to make decisions, are not heard and exist in name only. Moreover, delegates pointed out that young people do not get a say on curriculum design or how subjects are taught and targeted. They pointed out that they do not have an avenue for making suggestions or complaints, and that no channel exists between schools and the Minister for Education, who is responsible for education policy. The suggestion was made that each school should, in partnership with students, develop a 'Grievance of Complaints Policy and Procedure for Students' (OMCYA, 2010b).

Student councils

Under the Education Act 1998 (Section 27(4)), the right of post-primary students to set up student councils was formally acknowledged under law, providing students with the opportunity to '*promote the interests of the school and the involvement of students in the affairs of the school, in co-operation with the board, parents and teachers*'.

Shortly after the adoption of the National Children's Strategy (2000), the National Youth Council of Ireland conducted a survey among post-primary students (462 respondents) and school principals (300 respondents), and undertook a qualitative in-depth study of three student councils (NYCI, 2001). The research revealed that school principals and students had very different ideas on the role of student councils. The top 5 issues mentioned by students were:
- to organise extra-curricular activities (sport, discos, school tours, etc);
- to organise fund-raising for extra-curricular activities;
- to raise money for charity;
- a way for school staff and students to communicate and work together;
- to manage specific services for students (e.g. the school shop).

The top 5 issues identified by school principals were:
- to help students develop into mature, confident, independent people;
- to encourage an atmosphere of cooperation between students, staff, administration and school board;
- to act as a communication channel from students to the school administration;
- to give students and staff the opportunity to cooperate on areas of mutual interest;
- to help students make recommendations in connection with the running of the school.

Since then, advances have been made in the support of school management boards, staff and students to enable them to develop and promote student councils. This work was facilitated initially through the establishment of the Student Council Working Group (*see Section 3.3 above*), which was operational from 2003-2005. The Working Group was chaired and managed by the then National Children's Office, in cooperation with the then Department of Education and Science, to promote the establishment of democratic student councils in second-level schools. All the partners in education nominated representatives to become members of the Working Group. Eleven second-level students, aged 13-17, were members of the Working Group, which the OMCYA described at the time as a '*milestone in public policy-making*' (O'Donnell and Hanafin, 2007, p. 9).

Outcomes achieved by the Student Council Working Group have been mentioned in Section 3.3 above. Since then, the Second-level Support Service, staffed with a Student Council Coordinator, has produced further important outcomes, including:
- the development and publication of a module and accompanying resource pack for CSPE, focusing on student councils and the rights of children and young people to have a voice in their schools;
- workshops for new teachers and an extensive training programme for teachers and members of student councils, including the exchange of best practice;
- the first-ever student consultation on curriculum development.

In addition, the Service provides ongoing support and advice to Student Council Liaison Teachers, Principals, School Management Boards, students and teachers through school visits, training provision and information provision.

OMCYA audit of student councils

The 2010 audit by the OMCYA of student councils surveyed all secondary schools in Ireland, receiving responses from a total of 730 second-level schools (i.e. 28.5%). The audit identified that student councils have become permanent participation structures, with 93% of all responding student councils meeting at least once a month and just over half meeting more than once a month. The student councils were found to be run by students and usually chaired by a young person (DCYA, 2011a, Part 3: Survey of Student Councils).

Other key achievements mentioned by the audit were that:
- Over three-quarters of student councils (78%) had been consulted by their school management regarding school rules (e.g. the Code of Behaviour). 62% had been responsible for changes in rules.
- Similarly, 87% of student councils had been consulted by their school management on the subject of school policies and 73% had been responsible for policy changes.
- Student councils enjoyed relatively high levels of autonomy to set their agenda and make their own decisions.
- Some 37% of student councils were represented on other school committees.

According to the audit, remaining challenges included that:

- Student councils' involvement in school management decision-making remained rather limited. A large number of young people (43%) felt their views were only 'sometimes' or 'rarely' taken seriously.
- Similarly, while the study identified that student councils had most impact on the development of new and existing school rules and policies, the majority of student councils (75%) felt that they were having a 'medium impact'.
- The benefits of student councils have been identified by student council members in relation to themselves as individuals rather than to the student body as a whole. Just 60% said that they 'always' consulted with other students on important issues and lack of interest and understanding among other students were identified as the main difficulties for student councils. Furthermore, student councils stated that their most positive relationships were with school principals, followed by teachers and lastly students. Improving relationships and communication with other students were among the key recommendations proposed by student council members.
- Only 32.5% of student council members stated that they had ever used the *Student Council Diary* (a key resource developed by the NCO/OMCYA) to assist in planning and organising their activities.

Key recommendations arising from the audit included the following:

- Additional supports, such as student council networks, fora and unions, should be provided. In this regard, it should be noted that the mid-term review by the NCAC (2006) of the National Children's Strategy had recommended using the Union of Secondary Students of Ireland more effectively, on the basis that they '*could make a greater contribution and engage a wider group of young people*'.
- Ensure extra resources/more supports are available from school management and other students.
- Provide training, such as induction, skills development and practical training, for student council members.

National Council for Curriculum and Assessment

Having been a non-statutory organisation for over 20 years, the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) was established on a statutory basis in 2001. The NCCA's mission is to advise the Minister for Education and Skills on curriculum and assessment for early childhood care and education (ECCE) and for primary and post-primary schools. This advice is generated by committees and working groups within the NCCA through engagement with schools and educational settings and is informed by research, evaluation and foresight.

The NCCA is governed by a Council, the membership of which is determined by the Minister for Education and Skills. It is a representative structure, with its 25 members coming from organisations representing teachers, school managers, parents, employers, trade unions, early childhood education, Irish language interests and third-level education. Other members include representatives of the Department of Education and Skills, the State Examinations Commission and a nominee of the Minister.

The NCCA has a range of sub-committees to progress and support its work, with members generally drawn from the organisations participating in the Council. Additional members with a particular expertise or background relevant to the area under development are also co-opted onto the sub-committees. Young people do not appear to be represented on these bodies.

Consultation and research with children and young people emerge as the main participation mechanism provided for by the NCCA. Its website also features a 'consultation' section, where

educators and learners alike are encouraged to make their voices heard on issues relevant to the curriculum.

Some consultations are targeted exclusively at educators, such as the consultation on *Innovation happens: Classrooms as sites of* change (NCCA, 2011) and *Leading and Supporting Change in Schools* (NCCA, 2009a). The latter document, for example, designed as an internal reflective document, was aimed at further developing the NCCA's efforts in leading change and innovation in schools; it emphasizes the need for a stronger collaboration between national policy-makers, schools and teachers to effect change in schools. The document cites *Project Maths* as a first attempt to retire the concept of 'implementation of change' and replace it with the idea of 'leading and supporting change in schools'. The emphasis is put on defining a new set of relationships between the NCCA and schools and between schools and the change process. During the project, schools were directly involved from the outset, in curriculum and assessment development, in continuous processes of consultation and in the generation and undertaking of professional support.

Consultations that have sought to actively include children and young people in the consultation process include the consultations on the Early Childhood Curriculum (*see Case Study 9 below*), and reform of the Junior Cycle and Senior Cycle.

Case Study 9: NCCA consultation on Aistear – The Early Childhood Curriculum Framework (2009)

Aistear, the new framework for all children from birth to 6 years, was launched in 2009. Children were involved through a research study called *Listening for Children's Stories: Children as partners in the Framework for Early Learning* (NCCA, 2007a). In total, 12 children in 11 settings took part from different areas of the country. They ranged in age from 9 months to 6 years and included 4 girls and 8 boys. They were consulted and involved in the research study through the methodology of portraiture, which explores the rich, complex and diverse experiences of children within the socio-cultural context of their settings through the description and analysis of their portraits. This consultation is interesting because it sought the views of infants and very young children on what they enjoyed doing, who they liked being with and places they enjoyed being in. Portraits of participating children are available on the NCCA website.

NCCA research into reporting processes to parents in primary schools

The NCCA commissioned research into different aspects of reporting to parents in primary schools (Hall *et al*, 2008). This included an investigation into the experiences of various players with the reporting processes. Children from 5th and 6th Classes participated in the study through focus groups. The study identified that aspects of the reporting process were very important events in the lives of the pupils, such as when their parents receive the school reports. Children expressed strong emotions of fear, anxiety and curiosity before the report is due and then, depending on its nature, emotions of happiness, disappointment, etc. when the report arrives. Children also reported that they do not usually have the opportunity to look at the report, making them dependent on their parents telling them (or not) what it says. While they can generally predict what kind of responses they will get, children explained that they are still apprehensive about the report results.

These findings revealed that children take the grades they receive and the comments made by teachers about their behaviour very seriously. However, they also had strong views on how elements of this could be changed. In particular, children said that they would like reports to concentrate more on the positive aspects of their progress and that they would like more detailed information about their progress in individual subjects with a view to working on areas

of difficulty. They also expressed the view that certain competencies, particularly in the areas of sports, drama, art and music, were not reflected in the report cards.

The research also investigated children's experience of the annual parent–teacher meeting and children expressed similarly strong emotions on that event. About half the pupils interviewed expressed a desire to attend the meetings and felt that they would benefit from participating in the discussion. They would also like to have some input into what is said. Others wanted to know what was discussed and considered this to be connected to their learning.

The report concludes that primary school children are eager to participate earnestly in discussions of their learning, to have the opportunity to negotiate targets for their future achievement and to reflect on factors influencing their learning. The report thus recommends that schools could pay greater attention to the purposes of reporting and consider seriously their implications for both pupils' and parents' learning.

NCCA consultation on Junior Cycle reform

The consultation process on the reform of the Junior Cycle included consultations with over 100 young people from around the country and was organised in cooperation with the Dáil na nÓg Council. Young people were asked to give their views and ideas on the things that young people learn, the ways they learn and how it could be changed. The members of the Dáil na nÓg Council planned the consultation and ran the one-day event using the 'World Café Method' to gather information. The method is useful because it gives young people the opportunity to discuss a number of themes during the time available by moving from table to table and discussing topics with their peers. The young people talked about their favourite thing to learn, different ways in which their progress could be assessed and how they like to learn. In order to get as many different and new ideas as possible, the young people also did a 'Blue Sky' exercise, where they thought about what changes they would make if they were the Minister in charge of education and 'the sky was the limit'. The opinions expressed about the Junior Cycle during these discussions were fed into a report (Roe, 2011) and two Dáil na nÓg Council members presented its main findings to the NCCA in January 2011. The Minister for Children and Youth Affairs and the Minister for Education and Skills jointly launched the report in July 2011.

NCCA consultation on Senior Cycle reform

The Senior Cycle is undergoing review and reform in a phased manner with the development of more flexible programmes of learning, outcomes-based syllabuses for subjects, the development of key skills and new ways of assessing.[5]

In its overview of Senior Cycle education, the NCCA (2009b) outlines that the review process is '*informed by a vision of creative, confident and actively involved young people who are prepared for a future of learning*' and that the provision of a high-quality learning experience includes '*a school culture that respects learners, that encourages them to take responsibility for their own learning over time, and that promotes a love of learning*'.

The NCAA produced a leaflet on the consultation, entitled *Senior Cycle: Towards Learning Listening to Schools* (2009c), which outlines how schools are to be involved in the review of respective subjects, mainly through completion of questionnaires and targeted meetings and fora. All subjects open for consultation can be viewed at www.ncca.ie/seniorcycle, where online questionnaires are provided for learners and teaching/management staff alike.

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[5] For further information, see http://www.ncca.ie/en/curriculum_and_assessment/post-primary_education/senior_cycle/

NCCA consultations on Social and Political Education in Senior Cycle

The design of a new Senior Cycle subject on Politics and Society is long overdue. Work on the new syllabus started with a background paper to the development of the new subject, focusing on identifying the value of such a subject in helping students to acquire the skills and knowledge enabling them to be thoughtful and responsible actors in their world (NCCA, 2006). A consultation was carried out in 2007/2008, including consultations with young people through focus groups. The consultation set out to identify a range of topics and concepts related to the study of politics and society which are seen by young people to be relevant to them. Participants identified three broad issues as relevant to their experience of politics and society: active and participatory teaching and learning; current, useful and local content; and the need to be challenged (NCCA, 2008). Young people were also encouraged by the NCCA to fill in online questionnaires about their views on the particularities of the new syllabus.

NCCA/OCO research on children's rights in the curriculum

During 2009, the Ombudsman for Children's Office (OCO) commissioned the NCCA to undertake a report identifying curricular opportunities for children's rights learning in the context of the formal education system. This provided a detailed map of these opportunities in early childhood, primary and post-primary education, as well as an assessment of broader developments in education. The NCCA's report and corresponding recommendations are a good reference point for the OCO's engagement with schools. It is interesting to note that in light of one of the recommendations made in the report, the OCO (2009a) made a submission to the NCCA in November 2009 in the context of the consultation on the draft syllabus for a new Senior Cycle subject titled 'Politics and Society' (*see above*).

NCCA research on transition from Junior to Senior Cycle

Finally, the NCCA also emphasizes the importance of transition from Junior to Senior Cycle and commissioned the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) to conduct a study on young people's experience of their second year in Junior Cycle and transition into Senior Cycle (NCCA, 2007b).

Learning and way forward

Advances have been made to support children and young people's participation in education. Consultation has ensured that the views and perspectives of children and young people of all ages have been documented with a view to informing policy change and curriculum reform. Although it is not yet known what impact these consultations will have, it is nonetheless an important first step to more meaningful participation that young people are being involved in this way. At second-level, student councils have increased in number and their evaluation (especially the 2010 audit conducted by the OMCYA) will undoubtedly contribute to their effectiveness as a vehicle for ensuring that the voices of children and young people are brought to the attention of school management on matters that affect them.

However, the need for greater progress is also apparent from recent research that explored the experiences of children and young people in three settings – home, school and community – where 'school' emerged as the area least conducive to listening to children and young people (Horgan *et al*, 2015). While many children and young people highlighted very positive relationships with individual school personnel who encouraged and supported their engagement, there were an equal number who did not have such positive experiences. According to the research, children and young people had very low expectations of schools being participatory sites and recognised that they had little say in anything apart from peripheral matters in school. Barriers to participation in the school context, as identified by the children and young people, included:
- age and maturity;
- the autocratic and hierarchical nature of the school system;

- the lack of opportunities and space in the school week for their voice to be heard;
- lack of or poor relationships with key personnel in schools;
- poor information systems in schools whereby policy changes or decisions regarding disciplinary procedures are not communicated effectively to children and young people.

Enablers of children and young people's participation in school settings included:
- adult recognition of their agency with their increasing age and maturity;
- access to scheduled and unscheduled structures for participation;
- appropriate spaces in the school timetable for discussion;
- positive relationships with school personnel;
- a school culture that is facilitative of student voice.

Progress in other areas also remains outstanding (Brady, 2004), for example:
- the absence of school-based complaints mechanisms, whereby the voices of individual children could be heard more effectively at school level;
- the absence of student councils at primary school level;
- central resourcing of student councils at secondary level;
- further initiatives to embed participation culture across curricula.

3.9   Health and Social Services

The Agenda for Children's Services

Goal 3 of the National Children's Strategy, 2000-2010 identified that children will receive quality supports and services. A major achievement under Goal 3 was the adoption of *The Agenda for Children's Services* (OMC, 2007a). Like the strategy, *The Agenda* emphasized the 'whole child' perspective, with the focus placed on the child being supported within the family and the local community, and on an evidence-based and outcomes-oriented delivery of social and health services for children and young people. The first main objective of *The Agenda for Children's Services: A Policy Handbook* was to provide the means for operational managers and front-line staff, particularly in the Health Service Executive (HSE) (now Tusla – Child and Family Agency), to direct and evaluate their delivery of services to children and families against the strategic direction of the document. The second main objective was to encourage all Government departments and agencies to adopt this approach in their policy considerations and services regarding children.

The Policy Handbook was accompanied by user-friendly *Reflective Questions,* where children's participation is one of the issues directed at different service providers dealing with children and young people (OMC, 2007b-d). HSE managers and front-line staff (now Tusla – Child and Family Agency) at different levels are encouraged to check whether children have participated in aspects of service delivery, planning and monitoring, as well as evaluation of the respective services.

HSE Participation Policy

The main participation policy in this area, *Engaging Children in planning, design, delivery and evaluation of services* (HSE, 2008a)*,* was ratified by the organisation in 2008. However, it does not appear that the corresponding action plan, to ensure the implementation of the policy, was ever devised. Monitoring and evaluation are seen as important elements of both the policy and action plan, and a quality assurance system – including standards and benchmarks for participation for how children are involved in different stages of health services (design, planning, development, delivery, evaluation) – is envisaged. The policy also

suggests the development of a 'quality mark' such as the *Investing in Children* membership scheme in the UK, which celebrates imaginative and inclusive practice.

Despite these advances, the preliminary findings of the 2010 audit by the OMCYA on participation in decision-making structures reveal that only 57% respondents (of the 197 who responded to this question, i.e. 92% of total respondents) had received the HSE guidelines, 26% (52) had not received the guidelines and 17% (34) were unsure if they had received them or not (DCYA, 2011a, Part 2: Survey of HSE and HSE-funded organisations).

Also in 2008, the HSE released a *National Strategy for Service User Involvement in the Irish Health Service, 2008-2013: Your Service – Your Say*. The ultimate goal of this strategy was the development of a scenario where Primary Care Teams will be '*sitting down with their patients, developing the services they need*' (HSE, 2008b, p. 4). Goal 5 of the 7 goals envisaged in the strategy states that '*specific work will ensure the involvement of children, young people and socially excluded groups*'. The strategy elaborates further that '*all involvement work must make specific efforts to ensure the participation of children, young people and socially excluded groups*' (*ibid*, p. 16). With reference to the above mentioned participation policy (HSE, 2008a), the strategy also foresees that the defined actions under this goal will be evaluated and progress monitored and assessed.

The preliminary findings of the OMCYA participation audit (including 213 responses from health services at local and national level) indicate, however, that the National Strategy has been used rather minimally (DCYA, 2011a, Part 2: Survey of HSE and HSE-funded organisations). Out of the 192 who responded to this question (90% of total respondents), just 30 (16%) had used the strategy, whereas the majority (70%, 136) had not used it. A further 26 respondents (14%) were unsure if they had or not.

Research for the Ombudsman for Children's Office (Kilkelly and Savage, 2013) reported that a *National Healthcare Charter for Children* had been published by the HSE with a view to promoting a healthcare service for children focused on and informed by their needs and rights. The status of this initiative is currently unknown, however, and the website previously created by the HSE, populated with participation resources for those working with children and young people, is no longer available. Publication of important documents based on the two above-mentioned policies – notably *A quick guide for frontline staff* on how to involve children and young people in services (HSE, 2010) – does represent an important development nonetheless.

HSE – Local-level policy and participation initiatives

The increased emphasis on interagency coordination for the delivery of efficient services for children and young people is also reflected at local level. *Towards 2016* provides for the establishment of local Children's Services Committees. These are local multi-agency committees established within each City/County Development Board, chaired by the Child and Family Agency, with the aim of ensuring the coordination and integration of children's services at local level. Under *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures: The National Policy Framework for Children and Young People, 2014-2020*, the now titled Children and Young People's Services Committees (CYPSCs) are tasked with a number of planning and service functions (DCYA, 2014). In particular, each CYPSC will develop and oversee the implementation of a 3-year Children and Young People's Plan (CYPP), designed to improve outcomes for children, young people and their families in their own local area. The CYPP outlines the CYPSC's priorities and includes a detailed action plan. The actions and priorities identified by each CYPSC are derived from a local needs analysis and national priorities arising from *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures*. In 2015, there are 22 CYPSCs in place across 22 counties and 25 Local Authority areas. A *Toolkit for the development of Children's Services Committees* was revised in 2012 (DCYA, 2012) and more recently a *Blueprint for the development of Children and Young*

People's Services Committees has been developed by the Policy Innovation Unit of the DCYA, underpinned by the work of a Task Group (DCYA, 2015). This currently lists the promotion of best participation practice as one of the core objectives of the CYPSCs. Following public consultation, this will be finalised and launched in June 2015.

To date, the preliminary findings of the OMCYA participation audit indicate that the policies have not trickled down to the service level[6] (DCYA, 2011a, Part 2: Survey of HSE and HSE-funded organisations). Just over one-third of respondents (35%) from the HSE and HSE-funded services were found to be currently involving children and young people in decision-making and one-quarter (20%) have done so in the past. The audit also identified that 84% of all respondents 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' that children and young people have a right to be involved in public decision-making. Respondents who have involved children and young people in decision-making generally reported positive experiences and benefits for both service users and the service as a whole. The audit identifies that the lack of earmarked resources for participation activity allocated to children and young people represents a significant barrier to broader participation activity across HSE services (now Tusla – Child and Family Agency).

Further preliminary findings from the OMCYA participation audit of the HSE and HSE-funded services (now Tusla) identified that the majority of involvement of children and young people in decision-making concerns children and young people as individuals within specific services (DCYA, 2011a). The audit suggests that this was also the level of involvement where children and young people had the greatest impact in terms of influencing decisions that affect them directly as individuals. This has also been highlighted in previous research by Kilkelly and Donnelly (2006), which identified that children's individual experiences of healthcare settings very much depend on different aspects of communication they encounter with health professionals (e.g. understandable, direct approach).

The OMCYA participation audit also identified that mental health was the issue on which the HSE and HSE-funded services (now Tusla) most frequently consulted with children and young people. This area was also identified by respondents as one in which children and young people should have a greater involvement in decision-making structures.

Under its National Youth Health Programme, the NYCI undertook an Irish Youth Health Promotion Bibliography Initiative, seeking to establish a comprehensive and definite bibliography of published and unpublished studies that deal with youth health promotion in the youth work sector in Ireland. The aim of this exercise, in collaboration with the Health Promotion Research Centre, based in NUI Galway, was to identify gaps in policy and practice, plan future research and reduce duplication of research.

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[6]   As far as is visible from the current results, no differentiation has been made between local and national services in the data analysis. The 200 responses to the survey included 89 respondents (43%) from HSE Local Health Offices, 56 (26%) from other HSE services, 36 (17%) from HSE-funded services, 19 (9%) from hospital-based teams and 11 (5%) did not specify which HSE team, department or organisation they were responding on behalf of.

Learning and way forward

A more complete analysis of the extent to which participation has become the reality for children and young people involved in health and social services would require much more detailed analysis of a range of policies relevant to children and young people's health. These include the National Health Promotion Policy (2005); Strategic Taskforce on Alcohol (2004); National Drugs Strategy, 2001-2008 (2001); A Vision for Change – Report of the Expert Group on Mental Health Policy (2006); Reach Out – Irish National Strategy for Action on Suicide Prevention, 2005-2014 (2005); Disability Act 2005: Sectoral Plan for the Department of Health and Children and the Health Services (2006). For example, young people's views were sought through one focus group with young people in Neilstown on the development of the new National Drugs Strategy, 2009-2016 (Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, 2009). However, the document does not reveal any more details on the focus group (e.g. numbers of young people involved), the views of young people expressed or how they have been incorporated in the development of the strategy. Similarly, it is not clear what impact the various consultations with young people on matters of mental health, for example, have had on the implementation of policy (*A Vision for Change* – the Mental Health Strategy) or how services are delivered in this area.

At the same time, the reviewed literature identified that the policy framework for involving children and young people in health services is now in place. However, the outcome on local levels remains varied as the 2010 audit by the OMCYA on participation in decision-making structures clearly shows (DCYA, 2011a). Possible reasons why the participation agenda in health services has been progressed more in policy than in practice was perhaps identified by the OMCYA audit when it stated that resources dedicated to participation activity, such as dedicated staff or funding, are relatively low, with a large proportion of those involved in participation having no resources specifically allocated to children and young people. It is vital in this regard that the learning of other organisations and agencies be passed on to Tusla – Child and Family Agency (which has a statutory duty to ensure that consideration is given to the views of children) so that participation by children in decisions about their lives can become a reality more quickly.

3.10 Play, recreation and planning

It is clear that play, recreation and planning are matters of huge importance to children and young people. Despite this, the participation of children and young people in these areas has been achieved with varying effect.

A study on behalf of Combat Poverty in 2001 with children and young people from disadvantaged backgrounds identified that '*young people felt ignored and excluded by politicians, resident associations and community development committees and that the regeneration of their areas resulted in instances of them being barred from using privately owned commercial leisure complexes*' (Combat Poverty Agency, 2006). One survey in 2006 identified that 74% of children and young people felt that they were not heard when decisions were made in their community that affected them (ISPCC, 2006). Another study found that young people identified that this lack of participation goes hand-in-hand with a broader sense of an adultist culture that is quick to stereotype young people in local communities (Devlin, 2006).

Research on the experiences of children and young people in decision-making found that they were generally dissatisfied with their input into decision-making processes in relation to their local community, although those involved in youth clubs or projects were extremely positive about their experiences of voice in those specific settings (Horgan *et al*, 2015).

On a policy level, an emphasis has been put on play and recreation through the development of three major initiatives, developed under the leadership of the OMCYA and with the consultation of children and young people: *Ready, Steady, Play!* A National Play Policy, 2004-2008 (NCO, 2004); *Teenspace* – National Recreation Policy for Young People (OMC, 2007e); and the *Youth Café Toolkit* (Forkan *et al*, 2010b).

National Play Policy, 2004-2008

The National Play Policy, *Ready, Steady, Play!*, launched in 2004, constituted the first major publication of the newly established National Children's Office (NCO). The first of the policy's eight objectives emphasized participation through giving '*children a voice in the design and implementation of play policies and facilities*'. The policy stressed the necessity of implementation at the local level, mandating Local Authorities and other public bodies to consult with children and young people in the planning and development of play facilities. Under the policy's eight objectives, a total of 52 action points with clear responsibilities were formulated. Implementation at national level was mandated to the Cabinet Committee on Children, the Inter-Departmental Advisory Board of the NCO, individual Government departments, the NCO and the Play Resource Centre. On a local level, City/County Development Boards were mandated with supporting the implementation of the policy. Monitoring and evaluation was planned through an annual review of progress by the Cabinet Committee on Children, Ireland's report to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (NCO, 2005c) and an independent external evaluation in 2008. A children's leaflet, designed by and with children, also accompanied the *Ready, Steady, Play!* publication, providing child-friendly information on the policy.

Play and technology for children

Younger children's play was also the theme of an OMCYA-commissioned study on technologies used by children in Ireland, patterns of usage and consumption, and their place in children's day-to-day play behaviour (Downey *et al*, 2007). The research study sought to give children a voice to express what technology use means to them and also considered how children's perspectives have a role in informing policy in relation to play and technology. Children, aged 4-12, from 10 primary schools throughout the country participated in the study. A combination of qualitative and quantitative data was gathered from 292 children, as well as from adults, parents and teachers. Findings revealed that awareness-raising on the statutory and non-statutory regulatory frameworks of technology use in Ireland needed to be addressed; that adequate resourcing of technology in schools was an urgent requirement; that there was a lack of carefully designed information packages on ICTs for parents, teachers and others working with children; and finally, the necessity to put greater emphasis at a policy level on the potential of technology to enrich children's development.

Opportunities, barriers and supports to recreation and leisure in Ireland

The study on *Young People's Views about Opportunities, Barriers and Supports to Recreation and Leisure in Ireland* (De Róiste and Dinneen, 2006) involved a survey with over 2,000 young people, aged 12-18. Focus groups and interviews with 100 young people paid particular attention to the additional needs of young people with disabilities and those at a socio-economic disadvantage. The study provided a picture of the leisure practices and preferences of young people in Ireland, also emphasizing barriers and supports that they encounter in accessing leisure. Among other things, the study found that over 90% of adolescents of all ages enjoy 'hanging out' with their friends. The study also identified that just under one-third of the sample (32%) participated in one or more clubs/groups, such as youth clubs/groups, choir/folk groups, voluntary work and scouts/guides. This low figure is worrying given that membership of such community and charity groups is linked to increased levels of 'social capital', self-esteem, citizenship and an increased likelihood of the person volunteering in later life. In addition, the study identified intrapersonal, interpersonal and structural barriers to young people's recreation and leisure activities, such as a sense of safety, transport problems and lack of available facilities.

National Recreation Policy for Young People

De Róiste and Dinneen's (2006) research on opportunities, barriers and supports to recreation and leisure in Ireland (*see above*) was complemented by a consultation with young people on recreation, which lead to the development of *Teenspace – National Recreation Policy for Young People* (OMC, 2007e)*.* The overall objective of this policy was to provide appropriate, publicly funded recreational opportunities for young people between the ages of 12-18. The first of the seven objectives of the policy aims to '*give young people a voice in the design, implementation and monitoring of recreation policies and facilities*' and is further subdivided into nine action points, with main responsibilities being with the OMCYA (now the DCYA), the Department of Education and Skills, and Local Authorities. The actions are interesting insofar as they have the potential effect of mainstreaming and supporting participation structures, rather than ad hoc initiatives. So, for example, the first action point sets out that funding under the policy is conditional on young people's active consultation and involvement in recreational facilities, as well as their involvement in the post-evaluation of recreation programmes. The third action point outlines that guidelines and criteria for the active participation of young people in all aspects of youth work provision (including governance) will be developed as recommended under the *National Youth Work Development Plan*, and that this will be phased in as part of the requirements for statutory funding of youth work organisations and initiatives. Actions 7-9 address Local Authorities and state that they will utilise the Comhairle structures to inform relevant City and County Strategies/Plans, particularly in relation to recreational facilities and community amenity programmes; that they will encourage young people to participate on relevant sub-committees and through the Community and Voluntary Forums to avail of opportunities to become members of Strategic Policy Committees; and they will provide for young people's involvement in Estate Management Committees.

Monitoring of the policy at national level was provided for by a National Implementation Group, with the Cabinet Committee on Social Inclusion on Children reviewing progress on implementation and the City/County Development Boards reporting annually on local interagency recreation strategies to be developed under the respective Children's Services Committees (now Children and Young People's Services Committees).

The decision to include monitoring and evaluation arrangements in *Teenspace – National Recreation Policy for Young People* (2007) demonstrates the development of experience and thinking in the participation field. The policy set out that the national set of child well-being indicators, developed by the NCO (Hanafin and Brooks, 2005), would form a basis for measuring performance. Specific indicators include the number of children aged 11, 13 and 15 who report feeling safe in the area where they live, expressed as a proportion of children in the same age groups; the number of children aged 11, 13 and 15 who report that there are good places in their area to spend their free time, expressed as a proportion of all children in the same age groups; the number of children aged 11, 13 and 15 who report to be physically active for (a) at least 2 hours and (b) more than 4 hours per week, expressed as a proportion of all children in the same age groups. The resulting indicators were intended to form part of the review of the implementation of the policy. Reference is also made to the National Longitudinal Study of Children, *Growing Up in Ireland*, pointing to the component looking at the extent to which children are involved in their communities and also the recreational opportunities afforded to them through their local community/neighbourhood. This will provide important information for policy-makers and will enable developments over time to be evaluated.

Youth cafés

Following the identification of youth cafés as a key need by and for young people in *Teenspace – National Recreation Policy for Young People* (2007)*,* the DCYA has supported the phased development of youth cafés across Ireland. In 2009, there were about 20 youth cafés in operation (Donnelly *et al*, 2009) and this number has increased gradually since then. In 2010, the OMCYA commissioned the development of a *Best Practice Guide* and a *Toolkit* on how to

set up and run youth cafés, which involved children and young people attending youth cafés as well as a reference panel of young people, organised through the OMCYA. The reports by Forkan *et al* (2010a and 2010b) identified different models of youth cafés, yet one of the underlying core principles is that a youth café should be a place that is guided by the principles of the UNCRC and in particular enabling the participation of young people. On an operational level, the *Best Practice Guide* also sets out that young people should be involved through partnership in youth cafés, from the very beginning of the concept right through to the daily running of the café.

Public libraries

Additional evidence for the importance attributed to children and young people's participation in decision-making relating to recreational opportunities is provided by the study *Young People and Public Libraries in Ireland: Issues and Opportunities* (McGrath *et al*, 2010). Commissioned by the OMCYA, this represented an important initiative in promoting children and young people's views and opinions on matters that affect them, in this case on public library services and provision for young people in Ireland. Overall, 154 young people aged 13-17 were consulted in focus groups. The report is one of the few research reports also containing both national and international best practice examples relating to different aspects of library services. The study identified that barriers to young people's use of libraries was not their lack of interest, but issues like lack of communication between libraries and schools, or poor physical infrastructure. Interestingly, the study also showed that more than half of the library authorities surveyed reported having consulted young adults about their services. However, fewer than one in six library authorities reported involving young people in running services.

Children's voices in housing estate regeneration

No studies appear to have been undertaken with children and young people on their experience of participation in the planning process of the built environment. However, the DCYA commissioned a study on the views and opinions of children and young people aged 6-19 on the regeneration of their homes and community in the large, run-down housing estate of Knocknaheeny, Cork City (O'Connell *et al*, 2015). The research methodology consisted of 10 focus groups involving 78 children and young people. The study found that the consultation mechanisms employed during the regeneration process were inadequate to directly involve children and young people in regeneration schemes and there was inadequate information flow between the Local Authority and young people on what the regeneration programme entailed. The children and young people reported that their main source of information on regeneration was from their families and friends, rather than from the Local Authority. Children and young people also stated that they would like to be consulted directly in relation to the regeneration of their neighborhoods. The research concluded that children and young people should be included from the earliest stage of the regeneration planning process.

Learning and way forward

As a result of the National Play Policy, *Ready, Steady, Play!* (2004), significant capital investment took place in this area. For example, €7.2 million was invested in 77 playgrounds in 2004 and a further €7 million was invested in playgrounds and skate parks in 2005 (Spillane, 2005). However, no evaluation of the overall impact of the National Play Policy appears to have been undertaken. The only available information could be found on the website of the Play Resource Centre (which has been discontinued), which conducted a survey in 2008 of County and City Councils and published it on two pages (without detailed analysis). Compared to 2004, the results show an increase in playgrounds in most areas; however, development was very uneven, especially when seen in the context of the proportion of playgrounds to children (NPRC, 2005).

Although the National Play Policy undoubtedly led to an increase in play facilities for children in Ireland, because the participation of children at local level in designing and getting access to play facilities has not been monitored, it is difficult to assess this initiative from the child participation perspective (as opposed to children's services). Similarly, the adoption of *Teenspace – National Recreation Policy for Young People* (2007) and the involvement of young people in its development were hugely positive initiatives. It is difficult within the scope of this review to comment on the progress of its implementation, especially because it was devolved to county/city level and no uniform or national reporting system could be found. At the same time, as Case Study 12 below shows, the introduction of national policy in this area clearly prompted some County/City Councils to feature children's participation prominently in their respective local policies; this must ultimately be the desired objective. However, a limited review of some other policies suggests that children and young people's participation in relevant decision-making is not always understood at local level. Embedding participation across all Local Government structures and introducing participation standards and uniform reporting/monitoring arrangements (perhaps tied to finance arrangements) could improve this area greatly.

Most recently, significant advances have been made through including children's voices in planning legislation through a provision under Section 8 of the Planning and Development (Amendment) Act 2010, which entitles children or groups or associations representing the interests of children to make submissions to consultation processes on area development plans. This could provide a very useful and important hook on which the participation objectives could hang at local level. It is not yet known to what extent this provision is operational in practice.

Case Study 12: Leitrim County Council Play and Recreation Policy, 2009-2013

The Leitrim County Council Play and Recreation Policy, 2009-2013 formulated four action points under a 'giving voice' objective, which give a solid foundation to children and young people's involvement:
- Leitrim County Council will utilise Leitrim Youth Council to inform the development, review and evaluation of relevant County Strategies/Plans, particularly in relation to play and recreation facilities/actions/programmes.
- Young people will be included in the consultations for the provision of recreational facilities (youth-specific and general community).
- Leitrim County Council will encourage Leitrim Youth Council to actively promote and seek the inclusion of young people and their views in relevant community and statutory councils, committees and organisations.
- Leitrim County Council through Leitrim Youth Council will involve young people in Local Authority arts and culture and provision.

3.11 Summary of learning and way forward – Objective 1

Objective 1 – *to put in place new mechanisms in the public sector which achieve participation by children in matters which affect them* – is undoubtedly the most important objective detailed under Goal 1 of the National Children's Strategy. Section 3 of the current report has documented many of the achievements under Objective 1 and has analysed the extent to which the broader ambitions of Goal 1 have been achieved. The following summary is offered here:
- The DCYA has been established as the key driver of the participation agenda, undertaking and supporting children and young people's participation at national and local levels. It has worked effectively with a range of organisations to this end, building

capacity and developing expertise among its partner organisations and with children and young people themselves.

- Key structures for ensuring children and young people's participation within the DCYA have been established and have paid dividends in the quality of work being undertaken, increasingly including its evaluation.
- High-quality consultations, covering a wide range of topics and using different methodologies of involving children and young people, have been conducted.
- Well-supported local participation structures have been firmly established nationwide, predominantly through the local Comhairle na nÓg, where the value of having dedicated supports (in the form of Participation Officers) and resource lines to promote best practice can be seen. Challenges remain both with the Comhairle and the Dáil na nÓg national structure, which need to be kept under review.
- An increasing number of statutory agencies, bodies and organisations are engaging with the participation agenda, particularly through participation initiatives at local level, but increasingly also at organisational/national level and in service delivery. Achievements in this area are mixed.

The lessons to be learned from the achievements in Objective 1 of Goal 1 are as follows:

- There is significant advantage to be gained from expressing the objective of children and young people's participation in all relevant legislation and policy instruments.
- In terms of embedding the Comhairle na nÓg structures at local level, plans to link them with Children and Young People's Services Committees should be intensified and linkages with other relevant local fora should be explored (e.g. Local Sports Partnerships, Joint Policing Committees; Local Drugs Taskforce).
- The learning, experience and expertise of those engaged with the participation agenda needs to be more widely disseminated.
- As participation becomes embedded as a core value in those organisations that work with and for children, consideration should be given to the need to diversify the ways in which children and young people are involved and their voices heard in decision-making, possibly creating more informal channels of participation.
- Statutory agencies need to be supported and incentivised through networking and capacity-building. A buddy or peer support system should be developed to link those organisations and agencies having more experience of participation with others that have less or little experience.
- Independent and rigorous monitoring and evaluation of the impact of participation structures and initiatives need to become more routine and best practice standards and auditing tools need to continue to be developed. Their added value is clear.

SECTION 4:
Objective 2: To promote and support the development of a similar approach in the voluntary and private sectors

Objective 2 under Goal 1 of the National Children's Strategy, 2000-2010 is to promote and support the development of participation approaches in the voluntary and private sectors. The voluntary sector and to a lesser extent the private sector have been and are currently involved in a number of participation initiatives with Government departments, fulfilling a key part of this objective. The voluntary sector's commitment to and support of the participation agenda is particularly evident. For example, Foróige and Youth Work Ireland have seconded two staff to the DCYA's Participation Support Team, while the National Youth Council of Ireland has organised the annual Dáil na nÓg event in cooperation with the DCYA since 2003. Youth Work Ireland is also actively facilitating Comhairle structures.[7] To this extent, there is overlap with the conclusions drawn under Objective 1 (*see Section 3*).

Apart from the indirect capacity-building outcomes under the OMCYA Inclusion Programme, a review of the literature did not identify any activity or programme aimed specifically at supporting the voluntary sector in developing participation structures/initiatives for children and young people. Hence, what follows is an analysis of the voluntary sector's contribution to the participation goal of the National Children's Strategy.[8] This could be seen as a finding in itself (as already noted in previous research – Kilkelly, 2007), which points to the potential role that the DCYA could play in terms of leadership, advice and support.

Given that umbrella organisations like the National Youth Council of Ireland (NYCI) and the Children's Rights Alliance (CRA) represent multiple organisations, it was not possible to review the entire sector.[9] However, the OMCYA's 2010 audit of the voluntary sector's involvement in the participation agenda demonstrates a firm commitment by the child and youth sector to take children and young people's participation seriously (DCYA, 2011a, Part 1: Survey of Organisations). Respondents to the audit's survey of organisations included Comhairle na nÓg (40% of responses) and other organisations such as youth services, organisations and clubs, statutory organisations, non-governmental organisations, Local Authorities, VECs and voluntary organisations (52% of responses). The audit identified that of the 76 organisations that responded to this question (94% of total respondents), 61 (80%) involved children and young people in decision-making, while 6 (8%) had involved children and young people in decision-making in the past. A further 5 organisations (7%) identified plans to do so in the future, whereas 3 (4%) had no plans to include children and young people in decision-making in their organisation. Just one organisation (1%) was unaware if it involved children and young people in decision-making.

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[7] For example, Youth Work Ireland facilitated Roscommon Comhairle Council to set up the young people-led website, www.youthconnect.ie. The site provides information on different issues, announces events and also features a 'Your issues' column, where the Youth Work Ireland psychologist responds to online queries (anonymously).

[8] A range of voluntary sector organisations have been successfully involved in the OMCYA Inclusion Programme, aimed at increasing the participation of marginalised young people in the Comhairle structures. The independent evaluation has recommended an increasing involvement of a wider variety of voluntary organisations in the programme. A finding of the evaluation was that 'organisations' capacity be increased significantly in providing participation potential/activity of their young members/clients'.

[9] The National Youth Council of Ireland (NYCI), the umbrella organisation for the youth work sector, has over 50 member organisations, representing a wide variety of youth organisations, encompassing different youth work organisations (uniformed, general, issue-based), but also youth wings of political parties and other voluntary organisations that have an interest in youth issues. The Children's Rights Alliance (CRA) is a coalition of over 90 non-governmental organisations, all of which are working to secure the rights and needs of children in Ireland.

4.1   Policy framework

The main piece of legislation and the corresponding policy framework regulating voluntary sector involvement with children and young people is found in the youth work sector. The Youth Work Act 2001 put youth work in Ireland on a statutory footing, while the provision of youth work remains firmly placed in the voluntary sector. At national level, the Act places responsibility for its implementation and oversight with the Minister for Education and Skills. The Act also provides for a National Youth Work Advisory Committee (NYWAC), which is responsible for advising and consulting with the Minister for Education on youth work issues. Membership of the NYWAC is comprised of representatives of different Government departments and the youth work sector. Participation of young people or consultation with them is not foreseen in its structure.

At local level, Education and Training Boards (ETBs) are charged with implementation of the Youth Work Act 2001. Each ETB is obliged to develop youth work development plans in cooperation and consultation with local youth work committees (representing a wide variety of agencies at local level) and voluntary youth councils (representing the voluntary sector at local level). The youth work development plans must pay particular regard to the youth work requirements of young people aged 10-21, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds and those from Gaeltacht areas. In this structure, young people's participation takes place through the voluntary youth councils: at least one-fifth of the membership of a voluntary youth council should include young people (Section 22(4) of Youth Work Act 2001).

The National Youth Work Development Plan (NYWDP), 2003-2007 was also a major policy driver in the Irish youth work context and its first two goals are especially relevant for young people's participation. Goal 1 set out '*to facilitate young people and adults to participate more fully in, and to gain optimum benefit from, youth work programmes and services*'. Goal 2 aimed '*to enhance the contribution of youth work to social inclusion, social cohesion and citizenship in a rapidly changing national and global context*'. However, no evaluation of the NYWDP has been carried out and it is therefore difficult to say to what extent these objectives have been achieved and to what extent they have been successful at engaging children and young people under 18 years. The direct impact of the policy framework in practice remains more ambivalent, as has been demonstrated in a national study by Powell *et al* (2010) profiling the Irish youth work sector. The authors noted that many youth workers reported that they did not really feel the impact of these policy documents in their daily work.

Significant developments have also taken place under Goal 4 of the NYWDP, which set out '*to put in place mechanisms for enhancing professionalism and ensuring quality standards for youth work*'. In 2010, the Youth Work Assessor (a function set up by the Youth Work Act 2001), in cooperation with the National Youth Work Advisory Committee, established a Quality and Standards Framework (QSF). This is particularly relevant since it established a standard for a sector which is extremely diverse in terms of capacity, specific goals and means, sizes and ethos of organisations. The QSF serves as an 'organisational development tool' to assist organisations to improve their youth work practice and provide an evidence base for effective youth work. Of the five core principles underpinning the QSF, the first emphasizes the recognition of young people as rights holders and the importance of their voluntary participation in youth work. Youth work organisations are then supposed to reflect and indicate in their self-evaluations to what extent their provision of youth work is '*young person-centred, recognising the rights of young people and holding as central their active and voluntary participation*' (OMCYA, 2010c, p. 20). Indicators for this participation principle are systematic needs assessment; services responsive to the requirements of young people; young people involved in the design, delivery and evaluation of services; and clear examples of voluntary participation. The QSF is an interesting instrument that supports organisations to reach certain standards (also in participation) without being too rigid or prescriptive. In 2013, the DCYA launched the National Quality Standards for Volunteer-led Youth Groups, developed in consultation with a range of organisations, including young people. The first of the three principles underpinning

these Standards is that organisations will be young person-centred, in that the programmes, practice and people will ensure and promote the voluntary participation, inclusion and voice of young people (DCYA, 2013).

This short analysis of youth work policy demonstrates that participation of young people has begun to emerge at a sector-wide policy level. At the same time, a review of the youth work policy documents identified that no mention of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child is made in any of these policies (although it is often referred to in the mission statements of voluntary sector organisations). Given the sector's enormous potential to promote young people's participation on different levels (*see below*), it is timely to look at how the legislative and policy framework could be used to implement greater levels of participation in practice.

4.2   Participation structures in the voluntary sector

A large number of organisations work with children and young people in the voluntary sector. These can be loosely divided into those organisations that work with children and young people under as well as over 18 years of age (where the general reference to 'young people' is used) and organisations that work exclusively with those under 18 years. The former category includes both youth organisations, arts and drama organisations, and some involved in the health and social services area. The children's organisations largely work in the areas of child protection and welfare, and family support. Unless otherwise indicated, the information below is taken from the respective organisations' websites (in 2011, when this review was undertaken) and it is mainly a descriptive account of the extent to which the organisations promote the participation of children and young people in their organisations.

YOUTH ORGANISATIONS
National Youth Council of Ireland

The National Youth Council of Ireland (NYCI) represents the youth work sector in social partnership talks with Government, has a wide range of membership (44 full members and 10 affiliate members) and is very active in terms of advocacy, capacity-building (training) and research on youth issues (*see* www.youth.ie). The NCYI outlines its commitment to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in its value statement and one of its guiding principles is a commitment to '*actively promote the participation of young people in decision-making*'.

The NYCI has a *Youth Participation Charter*, which forms the 'value base' of the NYCI's youth participation policy. It acknowledges young people as active citizens and makes explicit why young people's participation is important in society in general and specifically for the NYCI (*see* www.youth.ie/sites/youth.ie/files/NYCI_WDW_charter_0.pdf). Due to the nature of the document, it remains rather general, outlining the general benefits and barriers of youth participation and the values and principles that are foundational to the organisation's participation goal stated in its *Strategic Plan 2004-2007*: '*To ensure that young people have the opportunity to participate in the development of policies and strategies that affect them*.'

On a more practical level, the NYCI also has an *Organisational Policy on Youth Participation* (*see* www.youth.ie/sites/youth.ie/files/NYCI_WDW_policy_document_0.pdf). It states that the NYCI will support the establishment of mechanisms for young people to participate fully in the development of policies and strategies that affect them and enable young people to have a say and be represented at all levels within the organisation. A commitment to the development of youth participation initiatives within the organisation is also made, including its core work areas, national programmes, governance structures, working groups and sub-groups, and external relationships and representation opportunities. The policy also outlines that monitoring and evaluation of participation mechanisms and initiatives will be undertaken.

As far as it is possible to ascertain from the NYCI's website, these ideas would appear to have been put into practice in some instances. The working group on the NYCI's *Vote at 16* campaign, for example, has included young people. However, the other three working groups (Policy and Advisory Committee, National Youth Development Education Programme Advisory Committee, and Volunteering Working Group) make no reference to young people's participation. The Youth Arts Advisory Committee, the forum for discussion and action planning in relation to youth arts policy and strategic development nationally, brings together representatives from both arts and youth sectors, but no young people are listed among its members.

The governing body of the NYCI broadly represents all member organisations. Ordinary members are elected through two electoral colleges – one youth work electoral college and one youth interest electoral college (the latter representing organisations that have some interest in youth, but are not exclusively working with young people, e.g. National Association of Traveller Centres). Member organisations then decide the nature of participation in the NYCI (to include young people, leaders, practitioners, volunteers, managers, heads of organisations) depending on the focus, issue and/or needs by participation in thematic networks. Participation of young people is decided by individual member organisations.

Youth Work Ireland

Youth Work Ireland (YWI) is a federation of 22 local youth work services, delivering a wide range of youth work programmes and activities, as well as advocacy for young people's rights. Young people's participation is expressed in YWI's objectives: '*To create a climate where the right of young people to participate equally in decisions affecting them is realised*' (*see* www.youthworkireland.ie/site/about/strategic-objectives/). It is also mentioned that this right to participation is viewed as an end in itself. Similarly, the organisation's last *Strategic Plan 2009-2013* puts young people's participation at the core and interprets Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child as meaning that '*participation is about young people exercising their rights to make real decisions in the here and now*'. These beliefs are then reflected in the organisation's structure through three concrete steps: a youth participation policy, a framework of action for youth participation and a participation proofing mechanism.

YWI's *Youth Participation Policy* outlines two specific actions: (1) participation proofing of all decisions made at national level by YWI (this is currently in a pilot phase) and (2) through the implementation of a participation strategy that '*disaggregates, communicates, integrates, monitors and evaluates all actions in the operational plan*' (Youth Work Ireland, 2010, p. 7). The participation policy at national level has been drafted based on a survey of all member organisations' participation actions and it is accompanied by a corresponding 'Framework of Action', outlining concrete actions to be undertaken under each of the organisation's core objectives.

What is interesting about the 'Framework of Action' is that it is tied to the organisation's four larger objectives and thus connects multiple levels. For example, under the first objective of developing quality youth work practice, young people's participation is made explicit through the implementation of an asset-based community development approach, leading to innovative youth-led community programmes. Under the second objective, advocacy is the main avenue for action, with the goal of changing societal perceptions of young people. This is aimed to be achieved through several actions, such as the 'Voices of Youth' programme (*see below*); documentation and development of youth-led self-advocacy in their communities; and identification of gaps and failures to involve young people in relevant legislative and policy decisions.

The 'Voices of Youth' Group is a national media group made up of young people from Youth Work Ireland (YWI) services, aged 15 and over, who are interested in having their say in youth

issues in Ireland. They work together to develop their skills to engage the media through interviews, blog posts, social media and press releases. The Group aims to increase the visibility of young people and their impact on media and Government policy. According to the YWI website, they have generated over 300 national media stories per year, with features in newspapers and slots on current affairs radio programmes.

Foróige

Foróige is one of the largest youth work organisations in Ireland. It is governed by a National Council, which determines its policy and governs its business more generally (*see* www.foroige.ie). The National Council and the corresponding National Executive are constituted by elected club leaders (adults) from across the country. When the present research was originally undertaken (2011), Foróige's *Annual Review 2009-2010* had just acknowledged that youth participation and advocacy needed to be developed further in the organisation. The report stated that a Youth Advocacy Officer would be appointed '*to explore current practices and make recommendations to enhance youth participation at all levels of the organisation …[to] ensure that all young people have opportunities to advocate on their own behalf both internally and externally*'. Foróige's *Annual Report 2013* reports the implementation of a new Strategic Plan with participation and engagement at the heart of the organisation. One of three critical impact goals is identified as increased quality of engagement with young people and therefore the numbers of young people engaged, and throughout the website the impact of this enhanced focus on participation is extensive and highly visible.

Ógra Chorcaí

A programme called 'Open Doors' was given the task of setting up structures to ensure that young people had a real voice in all decisions taken on their behalf by Ógra Chorcaí. The programme was to be overseen by a voluntary committee, 50% of whose members were to be under 22 years of age. Its role was to devise structures for participation and consultation; to give a voice to young people to express their interests, needs and concerns; to organise an annual forum to explore these concerns and to elect representatives to the committee; to train and support the young people to take initiatives that they have identified; and to prepare and facilitate young people to represent the organisation at local, national and international fora. The following outcomes have been achieved. Since 2001, the chairperson of the committee must be under 25 years; this chairperson is a member of the Board of Ógra and is the voice of the young people in all decisions taken by the organisation. The fora for young people to express their views have expanded and include biennial surveys of their concerns; young members participate in the Cork City Comhairle na nÓg, Dáil na nÓg and the Development Education Advisory Committee of the NYCI. A working sub-group of peer educators decides on the priorities and themes for all events for the year. They design the methodologies and facilitate at the Youth Forum and all Development Education events. Every year, members of the committee have represented the organisation all over Ireland and abroad. Foróige merged with Ógra Chorcaí in 2012.

Uniformed Youth Organisations

None of the uniformed youth organisations (Scouting Ireland; Irish Girl Guides; Catholic Guides of Ireland; The Guide Association – Republic of Ulster; Boys Brigade) have young people participating at the top end of their hierarchies and young people do not appear to be represented on their governing boards. Although uniformed youth organisations in Ireland, as elsewhere, are perceived to be conservative in nature, Leahy (2007, p. 5) makes the point that the organisational structures on the local level are '*adept at facilitating participatory democracy within a hierarchy*'. At the same time, it is not clear what role participation principles play in the

organisation and whether progress has been made to involve children and young people in the decision-making structures.

HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES ORGANISATIONS

Headstrong

Headstrong, the National Centre for Youth Mental Health, is an organisation that provides services and advocacy in the area of youth mental health in Ireland (*see* www.headstrong.ie). It is a specific goal of Headstrong that young people are empowered, that their voices are heard and that supports are centred around their needs. Headstrong is governed by a Board, with representatives and experts from both the public and private sectors. It set up a Youth Advisory Panel in 2006 consisting of a group of young people, aged 17-27, who play an advisory role to the organisation. Interestingly, the Youth Advisory Panel also exists at local level, where panels of young people also advise each local Jigsaw Programme (the programme that Headstrong offers on a local service level).

Inspire Ireland

The Inspire Ireland Foundation helps young people aged 16-25 through tough times through the delivery of ReachOut.com, an online service. Young people are involved through a Youth Advisory Network, made up of young people who contribute to developing written and visual content for the website and who help to promote ReachOut.com at events around the country. The organisation's *Research and Evaluation Strategy 2012-2014* commits to nationwide focus groups to be held with young people aged 12-25 once every three years.

Bodywhys Ireland

Bodywhys Ireland is the Eating Disorder Association of Ireland, which advocates on behalf of and supports people affected by eating disorders (*see* www.bodywhys.ie). As such, it does not work exclusively with young people, but is a good example of an organisation that is very relevant to young people. On an organisational level, the organisation envisages a Youth Panel, made up of young people, aged 13-20, who meet regularly with the Youth Development Officer to represent the views of young people. It is also envisaged that the panel help to spread the 'Be Body Positive' message and ideas on how to do so; think up new ideas for services for young people; help to develop a youth version of the website; develop a 'Be Body Positive' Programme for schools; help to design and develop leaflets and other promotional materials for young people; and be a 'Bodywhys representative' at events.

ARTS AND DRAMA ORGANISATIONS

The Ark

The Ark is a cultural centre exclusively dedicated to the promotion of arts for children, running a wide variety of creative and participatory events and initiatives (*see* www.ark.ie). It is a charitable organisation, founded on the principle that all children, as citizens, have the same cultural entitlements as adults. In 2008, the Ark and Children's Books Ireland (CBI) hosted an event aimed at building the capacity of the arts sector for consulting with children and young people in artistic endeavours (*see Case Study 13 below*). To date, children do not appear to be involved on a structural level in the organisation.

National Association of Youth Drama

The National Association of Youth Drama (NAYD) is the development organisation for youth theatre in Ireland (see www.nayd.ie). Funded by the Arts Council and the DCYA, the NAYD has a membership of over 50 youth theatres throughout Ireland and supports sustained development of youth theatres in partnership with Local Authorities, youth services, theatres and arts centres. The NAYD has a participation policy that aims to formalise the practice that the organisation has already been pursuing in encouraging young people's participation, i.e. involving young people in programme development at various levels of the organisation. The policy sets out several 'mechanisms' for ensuring young people's participation, such as consulting youth theatre members on new NAYD policies, the review of programmes and new strategic plans. The policy also mentions that consultations should be built into timelines of planning exercises, etc. to avoid being tokenistic.

West Cork Arts Centre

The West Cork Arts Centre (WCAC) has a Youth Arts Advisory Committee, consisting of 18 members, at least half of whom are young people, the rest being youth workers and artists (see www.westcorkartscentre.com/). The committee's work is to guide the WCAC's Youth Arts Programme, encourage the development of youth arts activities across West Cork and provide opportunities for sharing information on youth arts. Through its website, the committee (with member login) facilitates online participation in the committee for young people from all areas of West Cork. Places on the committee are reviewed on an annual basis and the aim is to include young representatives from as many different organisations and geographical areas as possible.

Grainstore Youth Arts Centre

The Grainstore Youth Arts Centre describes itself as the 'only dedicated Youth Arts Facility in Ireland', were young people can 'try stuff out', develop work in media they have not worked with before and a place where young people can be facilitated to realise their ideas (*see* http://www.dlrcoco.ie/arts/Grainstore.htm). The Arts Centre has a Youth Arts Action Committee, with members aged 13-25. They ('the more the better') develop the Youth Arts Programme for Young People and, according to the website, consider that their programme is developed with a true understanding of the interests and concerns of young people in the area. The ethos behind their approach is that their Youth Arts Programme will be developed by young people for young people. The Youth Arts Action Committee is being developed to

put young people at the centre of the process of developing, planning and creating all over the Dun Laoghaire/Rathdown area of South County Dublin.

Independent Youth Theatre

The Independent Youth Theatre describes itself as a platform for 'cutting-edge youth performance'. Established in 2006, it performs plays written, produced and directed by young people themselves. It is run by a democratically elected committee of young people and accepts members between the ages of 14-24.

CHILDREN'S ORGANISATIONS

Irish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty against Children

The Irish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty against Children (ISPCC) works to keep children safe from exploitation and abuse. The organisation's vision explicitly commits to advocating for the rights of children and to ensuring that their voices are heard. It has multiple participation structures in place to enable children and young people to participate at local and national levels. On a local level, the ISPCC runs Children's Advisory Committees (CACs), which include children between the ages of 8 and 12 from a range of backgrounds and experiences and which are involved in local decision-making, advocacy and advising to local offices. The local CACs are involved in activities of the ISPCC (such as fund-raising and interviewing prospective staff); they are consulted by the ISPCC on issues relating to young people both in local communities and on a national level; they are consulted by other organisations; and give their opinion on changes made in the ISPCC, such as changes to services, websites, leaflets, membership and staff. There are six Regional Children's Advisory Committees, which meet bi-monthly. Staff and volunteers who facilitate these groups have received internal ISPCC training in relation to participation and facilitation. This training is based around concepts of inclusion, empowerment and encouragement.

Examples of local governance involvement of CAC members in 2010:
- Involvement in the interviewing of a prospective ISPCC services volunteer with local staff members. Input on the decision to accept the volunteer to ISPCC training.
- Framing of the wording and content of the ISPCC's National Children's Consultation 2010, in relation to 'Children in a Technological Age'.
- Input into the local infrastructural developments of the ISPCC, e.g. the development/ content of a children's room in the ISPCC's Cork offices and the development/layout of the ISPCC Leanbh Service's new drop-in centre.

At national level, two representatives from each CAC, elected by their peers, sit on the ISPCC's Junior Advisory Board (JAB) which meets four times a year and works in a range of different areas, including reviewing and advising on internal ISPCC policy developments, reviewing national developments for children, advocating on children's rights, developing and advising on research. The JAB is actively linked in with the CEO and management, and participates in internal decision-making and action.

Examples of national governance involvement of JAB members in 2010:
- Final development of the ISPCC's National Children's Consultation Questionnaire for 2010. Language, question layouts and question content were amended and included in the ISPCC's final draft.
- Submission to the then Minister for Children, Barry Andrews, TD, on the JAB's submission on current children's rights issues in Ireland.
- Input into the ISPCC's annual Volunteer Conference. This included the development of a video clip for the conference and the selection of the ISPCC's Volunteer of the Year 2010.

- Feedback to CEO in relation to the ISPCC's work with its celebrity ambassadors.
- Review of the ISPCC's client evaluation tool, Viewpoint.
- Involvement with the FM104's *Real Life Series*, focusing on the promotion of children's rights.
- Discussion and decision-making in relation to topic for the ISPCC's National Children's Consultation 2011.
- Management and CEO passing on proposed internal developments for JAB review and advice.
- The JAB was also responsible for developing its own branding and a motto for its work, which is to be included on all reports and correspondence.

Involvement in the ISPCC's participation programmes is developed and fostered in a number of ways and is open to all children. Recruitment and membership of the ISPCC's CAC and JAB groups involves:
- former service users of the ISPCC's Leanbh, Childfocus and Teenfocus services;
- local children who respond to recruitment posters/notices in local schools, youth centres and cafés.

The ISPCC's Leanbh Service, which works with children and families who beg and who are at risk of begging in Dublin City, facilitates its own CAC, which is made up of members of the Traveller, Roma and asylum-seeking communities.

Inclusiveness
According to the ISPCC, there are a number of ways to include in the CAC members of all ages, background and situations. In particular:
- The ISPCC rotates the opportunities for local CAC members to attend the National JAB meetings, with expenses and travel covered for the members.
- CACs are always open to new members and actively encourage young children and young people to join.
- All staff members who facilitate the ISPCC's CAC and JAB groups have received training in relation to best practice in facilitation.
- There are a number of roles within the groups (e.g. chairperson, spokesperson) and these are rotated at both local and national level.
- During sessions, facilitators utilise a variety of techniques to engage the groups (e.g. verbal discussion, personal reflection, artistic expression, sub-group discussions) to ensure that all members can make an input in some way.

Empowering People in Care (formerly Irish Association of Young People in Care)

Empowering People in Care (EPIC), formerly known as the Irish Association of Young People in Care, was set up in 1999 and in 2004 it became an independent organisation with its own governance and management structure. In 2009, while developing a strategic plan, it engaged in a consultative process with young people, staff, Board members and other external stakeholders, following which the organisation changed its name to EPIC, reflecting its mission to 'empower people in care'. EPIC is now an independent national organisation whose purpose is to give a voice to children and young people living in, or with experience of living in, the care of the State. A major part of its work involves advocacy – research, policy advocacy and individual advocacy for children and young people in care. At the heart of EPIC is its independent professional advocacy service, which evaluation has found greatly enhances 'the voice of the child' within the care system, strengthening child protection processes and improving individual and overall child well-being outcomes. EPIC's *Strategic*

Plan 2013-2015 includes rolling out a new National Advocacy Service and constituting a Youth Board to advise and inform the Board on issues and themes for young people in care.

Since 2006, EPIC has employed an Aftercare Network Support Coordinator and two Children's Rights and Participation Officers, whose functions are to inform young people of their rights; empower young people to speak up for themselves about their concerns; listen to, support and advise young people; act as independent advocates for young people; consult with young people to get their views and opinions on different aspects of the care system; and promote the participation of young people in all aspects of their care.

Barnardos

Barnardos is the largest children's charity in Ireland. The organisation's Participation Policy states that Barnardos '*will ensure that children and young people actively participate as appropriate in all areas of the organisation, with the agreement of their parents/carers*'. The policy further states that in addition to children's participation in services, they must also be given the opportunity to participate in service design, delivery and evaluation, research, fund-raising in communication, advocacy and recruitment, as well as management and governance. The policy also specifies that everybody involved in Barnardos on all levels (including volunteers, managers and frontline staff) is bound by the participation policy. It states that Barnardos is responsible for providing the right kinds of supports for the implementation of the policy and that it must be included in all policy planning. The policy also spells out that any contractors must also adhere to the policy. It is not clear whether this policy is being implemented or monitored.

As an example, children were involved in designing a family support building in Tullamore. A Building Committee of 12 children worked closely with staff to help to build a child-friendly environment. The older children and the younger children developed plans for what they ideally wanted. Finally, one plan was agreed by the whole group – it included a 'dream corner', which was the idea of one child. The children and young people also had a central role in the ceremony to mark the official opening of the building.

More generally, however, children are not involved in the governance of Barnardos and there is no children's panel to ensure that policy and services are informed by the experiences and perspectives of children or young people.

4.3   Participation initiatives in the voluntary sector

It would be impossible to portray the wide range of participation initiatives provided by all children and youth organisations. The following section does not claim to be exhaustive, but instead seeks to provide an overview of the type of participation initiatives identified in the reviewed literature.

New media initiatives

Several organisations have established web-based, interactive platforms to provide children and young people not only with information about certain issues and raise awareness about their rights, but also to share their views and experiences with peers and the respective organisations. Some platforms also offer an access route to advice and available services (e.g. in the mental health area). One particular organisation (**West Cork Arts Centre**) uses its website for its Young People's Advisory Committee to consult online.

With a view to embedding young people's participation in the organisation, **Youth Work Ireland** has established a blogspot, called *Voices by Youth,* where young people can express their

views on youth issues in the media. Young people aged 15 and over from anywhere in Ireland can participate and simultaneously '*develop their skills to engage the media through doing interviews on issues of interest to them*'. Members are trained by the Youth Work Ireland National Office. This facility offers an important forum for older young people who are interested in commenting on a variety of issues. Many local Youth Work Ireland services use social networking sites such as Facebook to connect their members and announce information relating to different events (including consultation events).

Similarly, the **Children's Rights Alliance** produces an eNewsletter and a Children's Rights Podcast Series, although these appear to be targeted at policy-makers and an adult audience.

BeLonG To Ireland (the organisation supporting lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered young people in Ireland) runs the online *BeLonGTo Forum*, where young people can exchange experiences and explore relevant issues. The Forum has guidelines regulating conduct on the site.

Spunout.ie is Ireland's leading youth website. It uses social media to empower young people aged 16-25 with information, support and opportunities. The organisation features several thousand health and lifestyle factsheets on a wide variety of topics, including youth health, media, information, politics and activism, in addition to signposting to support services, moderated discussion fora, a youth media publishing space and campaigns and events for youth rights and support. Any young person aged 16-25 can join the forum and through it become involved in 'direct decision-making'. The organisation was youth-founded and is youth-led, now employing 11 full-time people, with an Action Panel of 20 young people from around Ireland who are central to the governance structure.

Recent years have also seen the development of several web-based platforms dealing with different mental health/well-being issues relevant to children and young people. **Bodywhys***, for example, stands out as an organisation that utilises new media effectively for a variety of functions. Not only does it provide a wide range of information on eating disorders and related issues (including podcasts, stories of young people affected by eating disorders) on an accessible and well-presented website, but also information and links on treatment options and services (including reduced-cost services). The *Bodywhys texting service* allows anybody to text for information and support, and it has also set up *Youth Connect,* an online support for 13-18 year-olds, where people can come together in a safe space to support each other and talk about what is going on for them. The support group always has two facilitators to keep the group space supportive and safe. Under its *BeBodyPositive* campaign, Bodywhys has set up the *Bodywhys Forum* where young people can share ideas and experiences about the campaign. The organisation also features on social networking sites.

4.4   Consultations and polls

Details were given in Section 3 of this report on the extensive work undertaken by the DCYA and its partner organisations to involve children and young people in consultations about specific policy and other developments. Large-scale 'polls' or once-off or regular consultations are also undertaken in the voluntary sector, where the views of young people are sought on certain aspects of an organisation's mandate or on other topics of interest to them. Some examples (mostly dating from before 2011) follow.

The **Northside Learning Hub** (a community IT support facility) held an evaluation day with some of their 'younger learners' to get their opinions on the organisation's strategic plan (2009-2013). Participants were drawn from different schools and their views were sought through creative small group work on certain issues. The findings can be reviewed on video-recordings made available online.

In 2009 **Youth Work Ireland**, in cooperation with the **Voices of Youth Media Group**, conducted a National Youth Poll on the Economic Crisis, with a view to making young people's voices heard on the effects of the recession on them. Over 1,000 young people aged 12-18 were surveyed all over Ireland and the findings showed a low level of trust in politicians, yet an overall optimistic account of the future.

On an annual basis, the **ISPCC** runs a National Children's Consultation Programme. The programme is run through participating schools, which have to fulfil certain standards to take part (e.g. have a student council, anti-bullying policies). In 2009, for example, 65 schools participated and the programme looked at '*the influence of parental drinking on young people's attitudes towards drinking*' (ISPCC, 2010). In 2010, the consultation focused on '*children in a technological age*'.

In 2006, the **National Youth Council of Ireland** (NYCI) conducted a one-day national consultation on the topic of tobacco and young people (NYCI, 2006). It focused on the themes of campaigns raising awareness on the negative effects of smoking, access to tobacco, the introduction of a EU-wide smoking ban, government policy and smoking. The views of young people were summarised in the NYCI's manifesto on tobacco.

In 2010, the **Children's Rights Alliance**, in cooperation with the **Irish Second-Level Students Union**, participated in a consultation event involving over 100 children and young people in Dublin, funded by the European Commission. The aim of the event was to discuss with children and young people their experiences of participating in European decision-making processes and to consider how they would like to get (further) involved in such activity.

The **Draoicht Arts Centre** is a multi-purpose venue used for a broad range of activities (ranging from drama, to arts and crafts, outreach and education projects, music, programme activities for families). Under its Youth Arts Programme, which features regular events for children and young people to participate, the Centre ran a series of events in 2008 over a 6-week period within the framework of *Tell Your Story – An intercultural dialogue project for children from multi-ethnic communities,* in cooperation with the **Chester Beatty Library**. Over 140 children from 20 different nationalities (recruited from 6 primary schools) participated in the various events, starting with a museum visit and continuing through workshops with different artists. The aim of the project was to encourage individual children to tell their stories and foster friendship and intercultural understandings between the children and their families.

In 2006, **The Ark** (cultural centre) hosted a roundtable event that sought to identify and establish linkages between the formal education, the arts and the museums sectors in stimulating dialogue about collaborative practice across sectors with children and young people. Among other things, the workshops identified the need to support arts and heritage activities led by young people and to encourage research about understanding children's perspectives on their participation/contribution to arts.

In 2008, **Children's Books Ireland** and **The Ark** organised a symposium entitled *Building A Culture of Consultation with Children within Artistic Policy and Practice.* Eighty (adult) delegates from a wide variety of organisations attended the event, which included presentations of international best practice from Scotland, the Netherlands and the UK. Prepared and delivered by an international consultancy firm (Playtrain), the programme continued with three workshops intended to provide skills to participants to engage children and young people in their work.

4.5 Advocacy

The present literature review identified that voluntary organisations are also involved in advocacy initiatives on children's and young people's rights, specifically related to participation. The NYCI, for example, ran the *Voting at 16* initiative*,* with the support of several TDs in which it campaigned for the lowering of the voting age to 16 years in combination with a reform of the electoral registration process. The campaign also made use of social networking sites to engage young people on the issues.

BeLonG To has launched several advocacy campaigns aimed at creating more positive images of LGBT young people and their issues across Ireland. In 2004, young people at BeLonG To wrote and designed a booklet and poster as part of the *So Gay* campaign. In 2006, the young people-driven *Stop Homophobic Bullying in Schools* campaign became the largest LGBT campaign of any kind in Ireland. In 2010, the advocacy campaign entitled *Stand Up!* began and a week-long campaign was held in schools and youth services around Ireland in April 2011, designed to increase awareness, build supportive links among young people and reduce the incidence of bullying and name-calling. This engagement contributed to the inclusion of homophobic bullying in the definition of bullying as set out in the *Anti-bullying Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools* (Department of Education and Skills, 2013).

4.6 Youth-led initiatives

Few examples of truly youth-led participation initiatives were identified during the course of this literature review, although this is likely to be due to their poor communication rather than their absence. It is also the case that peer-to-peer and youth-led initiatives are increasing all the time. Some positive examples follow here.

Up2Youth Research Project

The Up2Youth Research Project (a European-based research project that ran from 2007-2009 and focused on youth engagement and participation) identified two projects in Cork, which identified more radical opportunities for participation. The first of these was 'Unite', a group of gay young people (aged 15-24) in Cork that meets weekly and offers its members a social space, but also acts as a community of interest. For example, the group members have accompanied the Centre's worker to Dublin to discuss policy issues with the Department of Health. The group has also visited schools to meet parents groups and outline to them the challenges and difficulties faced by LGBT young people in school.

The second example is provided by the 'CUSP' group, which represents Cork skate-boarders. The group met with Local Authority officials and politicians in relation to the provision of skate board and BMX biking facilities in Cork City. CUSP has proved adept at representing its members' interests. These spaces represent some of the learning opportunities for Irish young people to engage with participation (Leahy, 2007).

Young Social Innovators' Advocates for Social Justice

Another youth-led example is the Young Social Innovators' initiative called 'Advocates for Social Justice'. This is a large network of young people who work to promote human rights, justice and fairness. The Advocates network is made up of young people who have carried out a Young Social Innovators' project in the past and who want to continue to make a difference in their community and in the world.

4.7 Participation structures and initiatives in the private sector

The scenario identified in the private sector contrasts significantly with the voluntary sector in that very few cases of private sector involvement in participation initiatives could be identified.

The most significant private sector initiative is perhaps the development of the *Children's Advertising Code*, which regulates the advertising behaviour of media outlets aimed at children and young people. Children and young people were actively involved in the phased development of the Code through a consultation event.

Other identifiable initiatives were related to the private sector, but were not initiated by them. For example, the *Fairsay* campaign, set up by Dáil na nÓg Councillors, aimed at encouraging media organisations to focus more often on the positive achievements and aspirations of teenagers. The campaign highlighted the negative portrayal of teenagers in the media and urged media organisations to 'talk to teenagers' rather than 'talking about teenagers' (2007-2008).

Private sector companies are also indirectly involved in positive initiatives or programmes through the provision of funding or sponsorship to the voluntary sector. Examples include Permanent TSB as funder of the Foróige Citizenship Programme; Easons and Bisto as funders of Children's Books Ireland; and Intel Ireland as funder of the Computer Clubhouse Initiative. Private sector companies were also found to be represented on governing boards of children's charities.

4.8 Summary of learning and way forward – Objective 2

Objective 2 under Goal 1 was aimed at *promoting and supporting initiatives to facilitate the participation of children and young people in the voluntary and private sectors*. The literature review supports the following conclusions on the achievements in this area:

- Some organisations in the voluntary sector are active supporters and strong partners of the participation agenda at national level, while at local level a large number of voluntary organisations are actively involving children and young people in decision-making. Much of this is being led by organisations – including youth organisations, those in the arts and those focused on health and well-being – whose remit extends beyond those under 18 years to include young adults. In this way, many organisations' participation agendas are not exclusive to children.
- Many organisations are involved with the DCYA and others in implementing Objective 1 (participation of children and young people, *see Section 3*). As a result, many voluntary organisations now have direct experience of facilitating children and young people to participate in formal participation structures (e.g. Comhairle na nÓg).
- There is no central repository for the numerous initiatives, events and practices underway in the voluntary sector and so this review provides only a snapshot of initiatives and projects. The OMCYA audit of voluntary organisations' activities in this area is important in establishing a more complete picture of the sector's participation landscape (DCYA, 2011a).
- The private sector has become involved in participation initiatives mainly through the provision of funding. Experience of involving the private sector in consulting with children and young people at national level and in partnering on selected issues at local level is emerging.

Even with the limited information identified during this review, the following learning can be identified:

- Although there is some coordination, there are many activities, initiatives and developments being undertaken in the voluntary sector that are isolated, localised and/or ad hoc in nature. Little is known about the compliance of these initiatives with best practice, ethical or children's rights considerations. Consideration should be given to establishing some kind of central repository for such initiatives with a view to identifying the kind of initiatives being undertaken and possibly linking or creating buddy or peer support organisations within the voluntary sector and between the statutory and voluntary sectors.

- Consideration should be given to making supports and training available to those organisations committed to the principle of participation, but lacking the expertise or experience to put it into effect. This could be undertaken by peer organisations that have been given a 'quality mark' or accreditation in this area.

- It is important not only to promote participation in the voluntary sector, but to incentivise best practice in this area. Consideration should be given to celebrating those organisations that use innovative approaches, especially those that use youth-led participation initiatives as appropriate. This could also facilitate the identification of voluntary sector 'champions', including those who evaluate, monitor and publish the impact of their work.

- Support needs be provided to the voluntary sector on how best to work in partnership with private enterprise in this area.

- Few of these initiatives are initiated by children and young people themselves, They are mainly dependent on existing adult organisations and staff to facilitate youth involvement, which indicates wider disempowerment of children and youth within Irish society.

SECTION 5:
Objective 3: To ensure that children are made aware of their rights and responsibilities

Children and young people's access to information is central to effective and meaningful participation. Although no national campaign has been held to raise awareness among children and adults about children's rights, including the right to be heard in matters that affect them, several institutional curricula and training programmes exist for informing children and young people specifically about issues regarding their civic rights and responsibilities. It is also notable that in November 2012 (i.e. since the conclusion of this research), a referendum campaign to insert children's rights into the Constitution took place. This inevitably had the effect of raising awareness about children's rights generally.

5.1   School curricula

Social, Personal and Health Education at primary school level

Among the many areas covered in the Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) syllabus, the strand *Myself and the wider world* includes topics related to citizenship, such as my school community; living in the local community; national, European and wider communities. The strand unit begins by focusing on the school or class as a community in microcosm, enhancing students' skills to share and cooperate; set realistic goals; develop leadership and administrative abilities; celebrate difference; be part of something that goes beyond personal interest; and recognise that they can make a valuable contribution to society. The experiences of democratic skills, such as voicing individual opinions, undertaking a variety of responsibilities, working as group members and being involved in school decision-making, are cited as laying the foundation for active and interested participation in society.

Civic, Social and Political Education at Junior Cycle level

The Civic, Social and Political Education (CSPE) curriculum at Junior Certificate level encourages students to become active citizens and raises their awareness of the importance of their active participation in democratic structures. Several modules are particularly pertinent to the participation goal, such as *Know your City Council; Citizens News; Vote – Exploring Democracy; Equality; Participation; and Election.*

Politics and Society at Senior Cycle level

The absence of a similar CSPE subject at Senior Cycle has long been criticised as a structural gap in the Irish education system (*see Section 3.8*). To address this issue, a new Politics and Society syllabus was approved by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) in 2011.

Politics and Society aims to develop the student's ability to be a reflective and active citizen in a way that is informed by the key ideas, insights and skills of social and political sciences, including democracy, culture, conflict, globalisation, equality, diversity and sustainable development. It will support the strengthening of a participatory culture among students since they will explore very practical issues relevant to their daily lives, such as exploring democracy in their local sports club and in their school, the potential for conflict between part-time employees and their employers, and the global reach of television and of video-sharing sites such as YouTube. Students will also get an opportunity to complete an Active Citizenship project, which will enable them to apply their learning in action. Their report on this project will

account for 20% of their final examination. Following its approval in 2011 the syllabus lay dormant, although in 2014 the Minister for Education sought its approval for inclusion on the Leaving Certificate (Ordinary and Higher levels) curriculum.

OCO – Educational resources

The Ombudsman for Children's Office developed a set of educational materials in 2010, called *What do you say*, on children's rights for schools (*see* www.oco.ie). Written by experienced teachers, these materials support teachers in primary and post-primary education to explore issues relating to children's rights in Ireland with children and young people. The materials explicitly address the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. More recently, the Office has developed another series of educational resource materials – *Small Places* (*see* www.oco.ie) – to assist teachers at primary and post-primary level to explore children's rights and responsibilities with their students in the context of curriculum teaching and learning.

5.2   Outside the formal education sector

Outside the formal education sector, several other organisations and initiatives contribute to raising children's awareness of their rights. These include information and advocacy events, resources and accessible publications developed to inform children about their rights. The following section gives some examples of this work.

CRA/ISSU – *Your World, Your Say*

In 2011, for example, the Children's Rights Alliance (CRA) in cooperation with the Irish Second-Level Students Union (ISSU) organised a one-day event, entitled *Your World, Your Say*. In total, 100 children and young people were consulted on how they would like to get involved in decision-making in Europe and internationally, and talk about their experiences with a range of European and international institutions.

NYCI and Active Citizenship and Participation advocacy – *Vote at 16*

The National Youth Council of Ireland runs an advocacy programme, which includes all elements relevant to the NYCI's work, including active citizenship and participation; education; culture and the arts; equality; health; international issues; global justice; social inclusion; and youth unemployment. Under 'active citizenship and participation', the NYCI's most recent campaign has been the *Vote at 16* campaign, which seeks reform of the electoral law to enable 16 and 17 year-olds to vote in local and European elections. Young people were encouraged to participate in the advocacy campaign through 'spreading the word', campaigning locally to politicians, joining campaigning events, setting up a debate in school or college, and showing support through joining social networking sites. In 2013, the Constitutional Convention (a public forum on the Constitution) recommended that the voting age be lowered to 16. Although it was originally indicated that this would proceed, the Government announced in January 2015 that a referendum to lower the voting age would not take place during its lifetime.

NYCI and *Youth Participation Resource Pack*

The National Youth Council of Ireland has developed a *Youth Participation Resource Pack*, which is aimed at supporting youth work organisations in auditing and improving their youth participation practices in individual organisations and projects (NYCI, 2007). The resource also contains a 'participation quiz' for young people, to help them identify how they are already participating in various aspects of their lives and on various levels (e.g. involved in a youth

group; signing a petition; volunteering; involved in a youth forum; spoken up on behalf of a cause; written an article for a school newsletter).

Equality Authority and NYCI – *Stereotyping of young people Resource Pack*

The *Stereotyping of young people* Resource Pack, produced by the Equality Authority and the National Youth Council of Ireland (2008), is one of the results of the stereotyping research study, which identified that stereotyping of young people takes place in a wide range of settings, including schools, communities and the media. The resource pack is aimed at supporting young people and their organisations to recognise and challenge the stereotyping of young people. It is also designed to challenge any stereotyping of other groups by young people.

Child and youth-friendly resources

Several organisations have made an effort to present information on specific issues, including on policies, in a child/youth-friendly way. Often, these materials have been developed together with children and young people. Examples of these include the child-friendly version of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, the child and youth-friendly versions of the National Play and Recreation policies, the *Dublin: Your City, Our City* guide (OCO, 2010a) and the *Young People's Report of the Forum of Young People in Care*.

Also, an increasing number of Internet platforms/websites have emerged attached either to a specific organisation or as platforms in their own right. Information provided on these is presented in a child/youth-friendly way (e.g. through videos; comics). Issues covered are sometimes focused on information provision related to one specific area (e.g. mental health) and sometimes cover a range of issues, including leisure time, education-related issues, relationships, etc. In some instances, this includes links to services or to facilities (e.g. complaints mechanisms, advice and support) offered by the particular organisation or provides information to different participation routes to young people. In some instances, direct services through access to helplines, texting services or responses by experts are provided through websites. Across these different platforms, it could be noted that they related exclusively (but are at the same time not provided by all organisations working with young people) to organisations who work directly with children and young people as one of their main target groups. However, very few organisations prominently feature a 'Your Rights' section on their websites. Interestingly, the 'Child Protection' section was often much easier to find than any relevant participation information. Although a complex issue, this might be an indication of the impact that the adoption of national guidelines (in this case, *Children First*, DCYA, 2011b) can have on an organisation's practice.

OCO – *It's your Right!*

To celebrate its 10th anniversary in 2014, the Ombudsman for Children's Office (OCO) launched a set of resources and materials designed to mark progress in the implementation of children's rights in Ireland and to raise awareness about children's rights. This includes a website (www.itsyourright.ie) with extensive input from children and young people talking about their rights under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and what they mean to them. The site also provides important information on how to access their rights.

ICCL and CRA – *Know your Rights*

In 2015, the Irish Council of Civil Liberties and the Children's Rights Alliance collaborated to produce a guide to the law for children and young people. This guide sets out the law relating to children and young people in an accessible manner and is designed to inform them about their rights, including to participate in decisions about them (ICCL and CRA, 2015).

5.3 Web-based initiatives

Many of the web-based initiatives and organisations are documented elsewhere in this report (*see Sections 3 and 4*) and so are not repeated here. Some further examples of web resources and supports for children and young people are described below.

HSE and Office for Suicide Prevention – *Let Someone Know*

The HSE and the Office for Suicide Prevention launched *Let Someone Know,* a health promotion initiative aimed at raising young people's awareness of mental health issues. The main support offered is through interactive information materials on this state-of the art website (www.letsomeoneknow.ie/), links to service providers and peer-to-peer support.

HSE Mental Health School Journal

The HSE North Western Area has, after consultation with young people in the North West, developed a *School Journal*, which is a mental health promotion initiative targeted at young people. It involves active partnership with young people to produce a homework diary, which includes over 60 pages of information on issues young people say affect their mental health, positive tips for coping and a comprehensive directory of services. It covers issues such as coping with family, depression, bereavement, sexual health, alcohol – all in a teenage-friendly and up-beat manner. The *School Journal* is disseminated through schools free-of-charge to Senior Cycle students. An evaluation of the first edition in 2001 showed that it was received very positively by students who use it and that its strengths are '*drawn from the language that it uses to communicate to students – language that is theirs – written by their peers*'. To date, three editions have been produced.

HSE sexual health promotion – *www.cluedup.ie*

The HSE North Western Area has developed a sexual health information website for young people (www.cluedup.ie). It has been operational since 2001 as an action research project, taking in the views, comments and concerns of a selected population group of 1,000 people throughout the North West. The site was developed based on the demands of young people for accessible, friendly, non-judgemental information about sexual health and relationships.

Young people were actively involved in every stage of development of the website, from planning the content and structure to the design, layout and name. They were also instrumental in designing posters, flyers and wallet cards, which have been distributed to schools, clubs, surgeries and public spaces throughout the North West. The site has grown rapidly, from a user-base in the hundreds to the current monthly average of 15,000 users. The format is bright and youth-friendly, containing sections on body changes, relationships, sexuality, pregnancy, infections and getting help. Although the 'Getting Help' section has a North West focus, it is accompanied by a national directory (McAuley and Brattman, 2002).

Empowering People in Care (formerly Irish Association for Young People in Care

Empowering People in Care (EPIC) runs a 'Where can I get help?' section on its webpage (www.epiconline.ie/), which specifically informs young people in care, or those with the experience of having been in care, about their rights to access information and to make complaints. Information is provided and support offered to individuals to make formal and informal complaints, as well as to approach the Ombudsman for Children's Office.

The First Progress Report on the *Report of the Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse: Implementation Plan* (OMCYA, 2010d) reports under Action 82 of the Action Plan that the HSE and Irish Youth Justice Service (IYJS) have ensured that all young people in care and detention have been made aware of the work of EPIC and would support children should they wish to contact or become involved with the service. This requirement will also be included in Care Plans. Information on the supports provided by EPIC is included in an information booklet given to each young person on admission to the Oberstown Children Detention Campus, where EPIC also provides an individual advocacy service.

Children's Rights Alliance

The Children's Rights Alliance website features a section aimed at raising awareness among children of their rights. Information on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child is presented in a child-friendly manner and a link to a child-friendly cartoon on YouTube, explaining the Convention, is provided. Additional multi-media resources have been developed more recently, including with the participation of children and young people.

5.4   Summary of learning and way forward – Objective 3

This literature review has noted some progress in the achievement of Objective 3 – *to ensure that children are made aware of their rights and responsibilities*. Although there is no single one-stop shop that provides children with this information, nor (with the exception of the Constitutional Referendum in 2012) has there been a national campaign to raise awareness about children's rights among children and adults, the following achievements are noted:

- There are now a variety of curricula and other educational materials available for raising children and young people's awareness of their rights. These are provided as a formal part of the school curriculum.
- Government departments and agencies and organisations in the voluntary sector have begun to make information on their rights available to children and young people, and some of this work has been undertaken in partnership with children and young people themselves.
- An increasing number of digital media-based platforms are emerging, providing children and young people with information on their rights in general and on more specific issues (e.g. health-related) in an interactive manner.

The key learning under Objective 3 can be summarised as follows:

- Very few organisational websites are user-friendly and appropriate for both children/ young people and adults. For those working with children and young people and/or seeking to engage them in their work, this is a significant shortcoming. Organisations have yet to fully appreciate and prioritise the importance of communicating with children and young people in a language and style that is both comprehensible to and engaging for them. A special section for children may not always be necessary if the material can be made broadly accessible. A toolkit could be developed to support those for whom separate sections for children and young people are necessary.
- Overall, organisations need to give greater priority to making their websites more accessible to children and young people, and should be supported in doing so by their peers, including those in the statutory sector. It is vital to involve children and young people directly in this work.

SECTION 6:
Objective 4: To support children and organisations to make the most of the new opportunities to be provided

6.1 Support for organisations

Objective 4 under Goal 1 is designed to ensure that the potential offered by new mechanisms, structures and initiatives that enable children and young people to have a say in matters that affect them is maximised, both by organisations and by children and young people themselves. To a large extent, the OMCYA (now the DCYA) has supported and built the capacity of organisations in an informal or indirect manner, mainly by cooperating with them on consultations and other initiatives. In general, the work of the OMCYA Participation Support Unit, established in 2009 (now located in the DCYA), has played a central role in supporting organisations to develop their 'participation capacities'. Although at the time this research was undertaken in 2011, no comprehensive information could be found documenting or evaluating the work of the Unit, this is beginning to change. In particular, the DCYA commissioned a study to examine young people's perspectives on the impact of their participation in initiatives of the DCYA (Martin *et al*, 2015). More generally, efforts have been made to document the participation work being undertaken with young people and the participation work of the Unit is being exposed to independent analysis and scrutiny. This is a very welcome development that needs to be embedded in the working methods of the Department as a whole.

More specifically, the OMCYA's Inclusion Programme (as it was then) has indirectly contributed to Objective 4. Although it was primarily designed to enhance seldom-heard children and young people's participation, a significant outcome of the Inclusion Programme was the capacity it built in participating organisations (*see Section 7.2*). The evaluation of the programme established that organisations involved not only benefited from the training and networking opportunities provided, but also took their involvement in the programme as an impetus to rethink their internal decision-making structures (McEvoy, 2009b).

TOOLKITS AND OTHER RESOURCES

Organisations have also been actively supported through the provision of toolkits. Four such resources are identified below.

Young Voices – Guidelines on how to involve children and young people in your work (2005)

The *Young Voices* Guidelines were published jointly by the National Children's Office, the Children's Rights Alliance and the National Youth Council of Ireland in 2005 and have become the standard 'reference' for organisations interested in participation work (NCO *et al*, 2005d). The present study found them to be widely cited by different organisations (e.g. the HSE, Youth Work Ireland and the National Association of Youth Drama) in explaining the rationale for their respective organisational participation structures and policies. The Guidelines contain three sections:

- The first section outlines the general background and value base of participation.
- The second section contains concrete steps relating to planning participation, including initial planning, choosing different types of participation, ensuring quality outcomes and safe practice.
- The third section covers implementation of participation structures and initiatives, reviewing different types of involvement such as consultation; advisory groups; service

planning, review and evaluation; representative groups; working groups and committees; children and young people on delegations; and staff recruitment and development.

The Guidelines contain case studies throughout and sample Safe Practice and Parental Consent forms are also included.

Youth Café Toolkit and Best Practice Guide (2010)

The *Youth Café Toolkit* is subtitled *How to set up and run a youth café in Ireland* and it is aimed at supporting community groups, youth groups and any other interested organisations or parties in doing just that. A companion volume, entitled *Youth Cafés in Ireland – A Best Practice Guide*, has the aim of contributing to the formation of a solid policy foundation for the support and development of the youth café model of intervention with children and young people in Ireland. Both were published by the OMCYA in 2010 (Forkan *et al*, 2010a and 2010b).

The Toolkit includes information on:
- founding principles of a youth café (partnership with young people);
- mission and activity programmes of a youth café;
- role of staff and volunteers;
- training for staff, volunteers and young people;
- design and location of a youth café;
- management of a youth café;
- funding and sustainability of a youth café;
- promotion of a youth café;
- evaluation and monitoring of a youth café;
- policies for a youth café.

The Toolkit also contains very concise and understandable 'tip sheets' for each of these topics, as well as an appendix with detailed information on relevant organisations and services (e.g. youth work, health services, social services).

NYCI – Why Don't We? *Youth Participation Resource Pack* (2007)

This *Youth Participation Resource Pack*, developed by the NYCI (2007), provides a guide to action and participation for youth organisations and was written through a youth-led consultation process. It contains action-based activities and reflective exercises and requires participation by both adults and young people to be fully effective. It also contains a wide range of case studies, highlighting real-life participation activities, and focuses on the views of young people and youth practitioners.

Some of the topics included in the pack are:
- types of youth–adult partnership;
- what young people and adults need to know about working with each other;
- how to go about developing a youth participation charter;
- places where young people should be involved, e.g. local authorities; housing; social, sports and cultural activities; transport; education and school; health; love and sexuality;
- young people's rights under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child;
- young people in rural areas;
- youth issues, e.g. youth health, safety issues;
- skills for change, e.g. people skills, getting organised, action plan for change.

Consulting with children with disabilities as service users (2006)

This document was developed as a review for the (former) Social Services Inspectorate (now HIQA) (Whyte, 2006). Although not a toolkit as such, it offers useful pointers for those interested in consulting with children with disabilities. Subtitled *Practical and Methodological Considerations*, it notes that at the time of its writing (2006), very limited consultations by organisations with children and young people with disabilities had taken place. It provides a useful overview of toolkits and methodologies available for consulting with children with disabilities and elaborates on basic conditions; additional intrinsic factors; supports; preliminaries and methods available for consulting with children with disabilities.

6.2   Supporting children to participate

All of the initiatives discussed above inevitably support children on different levels and through different means in participating in planned structures and initiatives. Some additional examples of initiatives that support children to participate in decisions that affect them are described below.

In 2006, the then **National Children's Office** developed a *Second-level Students Council Resource Pack*, which is aimed at supporting students in secondary schools to set up and run a student council. It provides background information on citizenship issues for children and young people, the education system and the function and role of student councils. Most importantly, the resource pack contains a wide range of practical tools, examples, games and handouts relevant for different stages of running student councils.

The **Kerry Diocesan Youth Service** was found to run a *Youth Participation Training Course*, aimed at young people involved in a leadership capacity in youth or community projects and designed to raise their awareness of their responsibility in the process of sharing decisions that affect young people's lives and the life of their community.

Foróige's *Youth Citizenship Programme* supports youth groups to contribute through concrete actions for the betterment of the world around them. Citizenship is understood as more than legal rights and duties, but also as encompassing working together for the common good. The programme supports groups of young people to carry out action projects in their communities in three steps: awareness (identify an issue in the community that the group has observed needs changing); action (plan and undertake a project that will address the identified issues); and evaluation (reflect on what has been learned and the impact of the project or what the community gained). Young people's groups can showcase their activities at regional events, with a selection of some going forward to a national event, at which the National Youth Citizenship Award is awarded annually. The Youth Citizenship Programme is run through youth clubs and projects throughout Ireland and entry is voluntary. Up to 3,000 young people take part in the programme each year and the Foróige *Citizenship Manual* guides the process (Foróige, 2010).

6.3 Summary of learning and way forward – Objective 4

Objective 4 is aimed at *supporting children and organisations to make the most of the new opportunities to be provided* under Goal 1 of the National Children's Strategy. From the review of the literature in this area, the following conclusions can be drawn:

- Through the achievements under Objective 1 in particular, children and young people have been encouraged and supported to participate in a wide range of participation structures and initiatives, including Dáil na nÓg, Comhairle na nÓg and student councils, and also involved in a wide range of consultations on different issues.
- A range of toolkits and other resources have been developed to assist organisations in their participation work. *Young Voices – Guidelines on how to involve children and young people in your work*, published in 2005, appears to have been used widely by organisations in both the statutory and voluntary sectors to devise their own participation policies and strategies. These resources highlight the tangible benefits of providing practical resources and supports in this area.
- In the voluntary sector, toolkits such as the NYCI's (2007) *Why Don't We? Youth Participation Resource Pack* has been designed to support organisations working with young people in ensuring their participation at different levels.

In order to move forward with the implementation of Goal 1 in this area, the following further conclusions can be drawn:

- The OMCYA (now the DCYA) is already spearheading the participation agenda and has acquired significant learning on how to support organisations and children in participation mechanisms. If disseminated more widely, this learning could be put to greater use in supporting and building the capacity of other organisations in this area. This conclusion adds further support to the overall suggestion made above (*see Section 3.11*) that the DCYA Participation Support Team could usefully be developed into a centre of excellence/one-stop-shop with regard to children and young people's participation.
- A range of further toolkits could be developed to provide additional support to organisations in this area. These practical guides could be either broad enough to be applicable to a wide range of organisations or specific enough to be applied to particular aspects of participation – both approaches would be useful.
- Organisations could be supported through the provision of networking opportunities in different formats (e.g. Community of Practice online portal). This networking facility could, for example, form part of a wider user-friendly portal with several functions, such as to reflect learning and best practice experience of participation mechanisms and initiatives in Ireland and abroad; to link the participation community in Ireland for exchange of ideas and experiences; and to allow general access of interested organisations and individuals new to the participation topic.

SECTION 7:
Objective 5: To target additional resources and supports to enable marginalised children to participate equally

It is well established that additional resources and supports are necessary to enable children who are seldom heard or marginalised to participate on an equal footing with their peers. Shortly after the adoption of the National Children's Strategy (2000), research carried out among 59 organisations identified that 52% of them consulted with children and young people experiencing or at risk of poverty or other forms of social exclusion; 45% consulted with young Travellers; 32% consulted with children and young people with disabilities; 28% consulted with children and young people out of home; 40% consulted with children with literacy difficulties; and 25% consulted with children and young people from cultural/ethnic minorities (McAuley and Brattman, 2002).

Examples provided by the research of such initiatives were:
- guidance provision for young people at risk of social exclusion (*My Name's Not Down*);
- early school-leaving (NESF report);
- supporting teenage student mothers to remain in mainstream education (*Waterford Student Mothers Group*);
- residential care services and the rights of children/young people in care (Western Health Board's *Charter of Rights for Children and Young People in Care*);
- youth homelessness (via the Forum on Youth Homelessness);
- play and recreation (Ballymun Regeneration Ltd's *Masterplan* for the physical, social and economic regeneration of Ballymun).

A key finding emerging from the research on the development of good practice for consulting with marginalised children is that although children and young people experiencing poverty or social exclusion might require additional supports for their equitable involvement in consultation, providing for consultation with them should not entail their identification as a generic sub-group of children and young people. Instead, these children and young people should be recognised, first and foremost, as individuals with distinct needs and abilities.

The audit conducted by the OMCYA in 2010 on participation in decision-making structures indicated that 40% of the organisations that responded had identified effective ways of targeting hard-to-reach children and young people, notably through outreach work with relevant organisations, groups, schools, centres and agencies that work with target groups (DCYA, 2011a). At the same time, the audit identified that over two-thirds (68%) of organisations involving children and young people in decision-making reported difficulties in engaging 'seldom-heard' or 'hard-to-reach' groups of children and young people. Paradoxically, while respondents identified young Travellers, ethnic minorities and early school-leavers as being the hardest to reach, the audit found that these groups are, in fact, among the most consulted cohorts. A similar conclusion was reached following the audit of HSE/HSE-funded services. Here, the least consulted groups were children under 12 years of age, children and young people in hospital, those currently or formerly in residential or foster care, LGBT young people, young offenders, children and young people with a physical or sensory disability or a learning difficulty, and young refugees and asylum-seekers.

Research has identified the barriers and enablers associated with ensuring that the participation of children and young people in decision-making is more inclusive (Kelleher *et al*, 2014). The heterogeneity of what constitutes seldom-heard young people requires diverse responses to promote their inclusion and involvement in meaningful participation activity and points to the need for principles to guide practice rather than uniform, prescriptive approaches

that are unlikely to enable young people to participate in ways that are appropriate to their unique circumstances. The report recommended the provision of comprehensive training and support for organisations working with seldom-heard young people, focusing on skills to promote meaningful participation practice and to utilise the output or knowledge generated from young people's participation activity.

7.1 Participation of marginalised children and young people in Comhairle na nÓg

The first evaluation report of the Comhairle na nÓg Council established that the inclusion of 'hard-to-involve' young people (i.e. seldom-heard young people) and young people who lacked the confidence to articulate their views remained a challenge to local Comhairle, although significant efforts had been made by some Comhairle to include these groups of young people (McEvoy, 2009b). It is important to highlight the need for capacity-building programmes for young people (as already provided by youth work organisations in cooperation with some Comhairle) and the use of creative participatory methodologies for making the voices of these young people heard in a forum like Comhairle. The Roscommon Comhairle can be cited as a good example of this because it uses a number of non-verbal methods (such as body mapping, 'Agony Aunt' letters, a walking debate and statement boards) to support young people to express their voice. Perhaps training on such methodologies could be more systematically addressed across agencies and organisations.

From a governance perspective, the Comhairle evaluation (McEvoy, 2009a) established that systematic cooperation between organisations that work with seldom-heard young people, as well as supporting these organisations' membership on steering committees, could facilitate fuller participation of these young people. A detailed list of a diverse range of strategies for inclusion of young people who are seldom heard is included in the evaluation report and their application across all Comhairle and other participation mechanisms could be encouraged (*ibid*, p. 14).

Importantly, the second evaluation of the Comhairle na nÓg found that the desire to profile young people with categories such as 'hard to reach' or 'seldom heard' (albeit done with good intentions) is perceived as invasive by some young people and those involved with them in the Comhairle structures (McEvoy, 2011). The evaluation therefore recommended the establishment of a sensitive mechanism to record the profile of Comhairle members without 'labelling' them.

7.2 OMCYA Inclusion Programme

In recognising the need to create new opportunities for seldom-heard children and young people to participate in decision-making structures and processes, the OMCYA set up the Inclusion Programme in 2007. The programme sought to enable seldom-heard young people to participate in the Comhairle na nÓg structure, but also in other fora such as the Headstrong Youth Advisory Panel, the OCO's Youth Advisory Panel and the Wexford Youth Cabinet. Funding and capacity-building was provided to 7 voluntary organisations that work with marginalised children and young people. These organisations were BeLonG To, Barnardos, Youth Work Ireland, Irish Wheelchair Association, Irish Association of Young People in Care (now EPIC), Inclusion Ireland and Pavee Point.

After one year, some 48 young people had become involved in either the OCO's Youth Advisory Panel or a local Comhairle na nÓg, and a total of 86 young people were involved in various initiatives. The independent evaluation of the Inclusion Programme (McEvoy, 2009b) demonstrated that the vast majority of organisations and young people involved would not

have had access to participation structures without this targeted support, demonstrating the need for a dedicated support programme in this area. Two further major impacts of the programme were highlighted by the independent evaluation: (1) that young people reported several benefits of being involved and (2) that involved organisations not only benefited from the training and networking opportunity provided, but also took their involvement as the impetus to rethink their internal decision-making structures.

The independent evaluation also pointed out challenges, which provide relevant learning here: the need for more specific information provision for organisations; for practical presentations to make the participation structures more understandable and tangible to organisations working with marginalised children; and for inclusion of a broader range of organisations.

7.3   Specific examples of inclusive participation

Children in the care system

In addition to the many challenges faced by children and young people in the care system (i.e. children in foster and residential care), research also identifies that children in care encounter difficulties having their rights vindicated in relation to the lack of support for foster carers, serious shortcomings in residential care, non-fulfilment of the right to review, education-related deficits, stigma, stereotyping and bullying (Kilkelly, 2007, pp. 22-25). Research has also identified that many children in residential care feel that they are not offered opportunities to provide their views on rules, particularly regarding day-to-day decision-making (Edmond, 2002). Following the recommendation of the *Report of the Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse* (the 'Ryan Report' of 2009) to enable children in care to communicate without fear, the OMCYA launched a consultation process with children and young people in State care. Between January and July 2010, 211 children and young people aged between 8 and 18+ took part in the consultation process, which consisted of 15 separate consultations in six venues around the country. Children and young people included were those receiving long-term, non-episodic State care under the Child Care Act 1991 or the Children Act 2001 in the following care settings:
- foster care (8-12 year-olds and 13-18 year-olds);
- residential care and special care;
- children with disabilities living in care;
- Children Detention Schools;
- St. Patrick's Institution;
- separated children seeking asylum;
- young people who had recently left the care system.

The consultation process was led by the OMCYA together with a Consultation Oversight Committee including key stakeholders, such as the HSE, the Research Division of the Department of Health and Children, the Irish Youth Justice Service (IYJS), the Social Services Inspectorate (SSI) within HIQA, IAYPIC (now EPIC) and the Probation Service.

The objectives of the consultations were:
- to get the views of children and young people in the care of the State on the issues that really mattered to them and on which they would like to be heard;
- to explore existing mechanisms for children and young people to express their views;
- to make recommendations on future structures to be established for children and young people to express their views.

A number of specific recommendations emerged from the consultation. These are detailed in the report *Listen to Our Voices! Hearing Children and Young People living in the Care of the State* (DCYA, 2011c). The recommendations are categorised into three areas: hearing the voice of young people in care; system of care for young people; and system of care practices. The Voices of Children in Care Group was established in response to the first of these recommendations. In June 2013, the children and young people took the decision to re-name the group TACTIC (Teenagers and Children Talking in Care) and this group meets on a regular basis with Citizen Participation Unit officials in the DCYA to work on issues for children in care.

Empowering People in Care (formerly IAYPIC) – Forum for Young People in Care

Empowering People in Care (EPIC) has been mentioned several times in this review and was also included in the OMCYA's Inclusion Programme. The importance of the organisation's role in supporting children in care through advocacy, provision of information and individual support is reflected in the fact that a separate action point (No. 82) was dedicated to its work in the OMCYA's (2009b) *Implementation Plan* for the Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse (Ryan Report).

Between July and December 2010, IAYPIC (in cooperation with the HSE North, as it was then) organised a Forum for Young People in Care. Eight young people, aged 14-16, living in relative and non-relative foster care chose to participate in the Forum's eight meetings on Saturdays. The aim of the Forum was to promote the participation of and give a voice to young people in foster care in the North Dublin area on issues that affect their care. The agenda for the meetings was set by the young people themselves, who chose the following topics:
- Garda clearance;
- placement with relatives/non-relatives;
- feeling different;
- access.

The issue of the role of social workers, although not initially decided upon, also came up repeatedly across the Forum's consultations.

The report that resulted from the Forum, called *Our Side: Forum for Young People in Care* (IAYPIC, 2010), was written by the young people themselves and it provides an important insight into their views on the above mentioned themes. Each section concluded with direct questions posed to the HSE (now Tusla – Child and Family Agency). For example, young people wanted more precise information about their legal rights and had questions about decision-making involving the HSE and their foster parents.

Young people also had very clear views about their placement with relatives, about receiving clear information on the length of placements and a strong dislike of temporary placements, which they found unsettling. In terms of access, young people formulated the question as to why social workers do not listen more to them about their wishes on access issues with their birth parents and their siblings.

At the end of the Forum, young people were asked about their experience of participating. They explained that their motivations to take part were:
- to improve the lives of young people in care,
- to have the opportunity to make their voices heard and hear what other young people had to say.

The young participants also reported enjoying the experience of meeting other young people and 'getting things off their chest'. They were keen for more fora to take place, including more young people and more views, with a particular focus on the role of the social worker.

Children in the criminal justice system

The Children Act 2001 provides for increased participation of children in conflict with the law in decisions that affect them. Section 96 of the Act provides that any Court dealing with children charged with offences must have regard to the principle that the child has a right to be heard and to participate in any proceedings of the Court that can affect them. Despite this, concerns have been expressed about the extent to which children understand and participate in decisions made in this setting (Kilkelly, 2008). In 2015, the District Court developed a Bench Book for the Children Court to guide decision-making in criminal proceedings against children.

Children and young people were consulted on the National Youth Justice Strategy, 2008-2010 (IYJS, 2008). Children involved in the consultations were aged 12-17 and recruited from several Garda Youth Diversion Projects and the OMCYA's Children and Young People's Forum. Their views on key issues have been summarised in the strategy, highlighting issues such as the perception of crime as acceptable and 'fun' among some young people, as well as the challenges faced by young people and which clearly contribute to offending behaviour, such as depression, stress, family problems, lack of support, school problems and lack of recreational facilities. Young people's suggestions for reducing the risk of offending included equipping young people with education and training; providing more facilities, including recreation; and expanding the Garda Youth Diversion Projects (*ibid*, p. 8). The strategy further mentions that '*through this strategy and consultation when appropriate with young people, the IYJS aims to improve the delivery of services and outcomes for them, their families, victims and the community*'.

Despite these positive examples, a review of the literature suggests that the level of participation of young people among those in conflict with the law remains uneven overall. In the area of law reform, for example, children and young people are not regularly consulted and other developments such as the redesign of the Oberstown Detention Campus have not been informed by the views of young people.

To address the fact that young people in detention rarely have a say, the Ombudsman for Children's Office (OCO) undertook a project at the end of 2009 with young people detained in St. Patrick's Institution (OCO, 2011). These young people can be considered to be particularly marginalised, not only due to their likely background leading to offending, but also through the fact that they were at the time excluded from the complaints remit of the Ombudsman. Young people were consulted throughout the research project on all areas relevant to their experiences in detention and their voices are reflected clearly in the OCO's report, which details their experiences and their recommendations for change and reform. Significantly, their views were brought to the Irish Prison Service (IPS) on their behalf and the IPS response was published together with the young people's views in the final report. This publication undoubtedly strengthened the case for the removal of all young people under 18 from St. Patrick's Institution.

Separated children

Research shows that separated children are doubly discriminated against, due to their status as children and due to their status as asylum-seekers, and that the main challenges relate to the underlying absence of a child-focused and age-appropriate approach to the asylum process where children are concerned (Kilkelly, 2007). The identified gaps relating to participation issues include the lack of ability of children to participate in making decisions concerning their welfare, particularly when in the care of the HSE (now Tusla – Child and

Family Agency). Separated children are also excluded from the Ombudsman for Children's Office complaints function.

The OCO's Separated Children Project, which ran from January to October 2009, aimed to better understand the lives and level of care afforded to separated children in Ireland by hearing directly from them (*see* www.oco.ie/separated-children-project-2009/). The project involved 35 separated children and young people in the Dublin area and recorded their stories and experiences. There were three principal outputs from the project, all published by the OCO in 2010:

- a guidebook compiled by the young people for young people, entitled *Dublin: Your City, Our City* (OCO, 2010a)*;*
- a storybook setting out their stories, entitled *All I have to say – Separated children in their own words* (OCO, 2010b);
- a project report entitled *Separated Children living in Ireland* (OCO, 2010c).

Many issues identified by the young people involved in the OCO's project related to the absence of opportunities for them to have their voices heard, including:

- not being consulted on care plans;
- being informed about changes in accommodation arrangements at short notice and without any say in the matter;
- not having an allocated social worker and no provision of information on who to talk to.

Recommendations included in the project report (OCO, 2010c, pp. 53-54) addressed a wide range of issues. Particularly in relation to participation, the report recommended that:

- Consideration be given to the establishment of a mechanism of advocacy for separated children. In addition, a guardian/adviser system should be introduced to ensure that children are independently advised and represented.
- An effective communication and complaints mechanism should be set up in all accommodation centres. The HSE should review the hostel complaints mechanism to ensure that children have a genuine mechanism to express any concerns. The complaints should be monitored, not only by the hostels but also by the HSE and developments regularly communicated to the young people.

There have been significant changes in this area since the *Implementation Plan* for the Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse (OMYCA, 2009b) recommended that the HSE stop using private hostels for separated children and implement an 'equity of care policy' to accommodate all separated children in mainstream care on a par with other children in the care system. Following this, arrangements were put in place to accommodate the children, largely in foster care settings, and the hostels were closed in December 2010.

Traveller children

Traveller children's rights are seriously limited across a number of areas of their lives, including participation in education, over-representation in the care system, lower standards of health and lack of access to safe play facilities (Kilkelly, 2007). Pavee Point, the organisation working for the promotion and realisation of Travellers' human rights, also runs a youth work programme called the Rudus Programme (*see* http://paveepoint.ie/pdf/TheRudusProject.pdf). It includes youth work practice based on critical social and educational principles, advocacy, networking and policy development relating to young Travellers' human rights.

Pavee Point currently runs the Voice of the Child Project as an initiative developed by Pavee Point Traveller Centre in association with six organisations working with young Travellers. The project seeks to enable young Travellers to voice their opinions on a variety of issues that they have identified as important to them. Innovative and creative methodologies are being used in

the consultations and young Traveller men and women involved in the project sit on various committees and fora that affect their lives.

7.4   The role of research

The National Children's Strategy identified as a strategic objective the need to better understand children's lives and in the implementation of Goal 2 of the strategy, research was commissioned and funded with a view to documenting the lives of marginalised children and those living with marginalised issues. As a result of this investment, the experiences of certain groups of seldom-heard children and young people have been documented for the first time. A few select examples illustrate this point.

The experience of young people on remand was the focus of an important study commissioned by the OMCYA with a view to informing policy and practice regarding the development of services and supports for **children on remand in Ireland**. Seymour and Butler (2008) conducted 30 semi-structured interviews with children aged 13-19 and 218 case observations were undertaken at the Dublin Children Court. Young people's experiences not only revealed important findings about the social circumstances of young people in the criminal justice system, but also very practical issues like the lack of proper communication of bail conditions.

Another study funded by the OMCYA under the National Children's Strategy documented children's experiences of **domestic violence and domestic violence services**. Hogan and O'Reilly (2007) concluded for the first time that the voices of the children themselves were paramount. A key objective of the study was to broaden the understanding of how best to engage children in this type of research and particular attention was paid to the process of recruiting, engaging and interviewing vulnerable children. In-depth interviews were conducted with 22 children (15 households), 19 mothers and 22 professionals. The study identified that children were very well able to express how domestic violence affected them and their families and what they expected from support services.

Understanding the **experiences of young carers** (i.e. under the age of 18) was the focus of another study, which interviewed 26 young carers, aged between 5 and 18, who were caring for another member of their family (mainly siblings, but also parents). The findings revealed a complex picture of both positive and negative social, physical and emotional experiences of young carers (OMCYA, 2010e).

Two other studies funded by the National Children's Strategy Research Programme focused on the experiences and perspectives of children in the healthcare system and, more specifically, on the extent to which children participate in decisions made about their care. The first study (Kilkelly and Donnelly, 2006) focused on children's experiences of **being heard in the general healthcare setting** and recorded perspectives of children (50 children under 14 years), parents and health professionals in this context. The role of parents was identified as key and particular importance was attached to the need for training and resources (physical environment and time) in enabling health professionals to communicate more effectively with children in their care. Similar conclusions were found in Coyne *et al*'s (2006) study on children's experiences of **participation in consultation and decision-making in Irish hospitals**.

In 2011, the DCYA published a *National Strategy for Research and Data on Children's Lives, 2011-2016*. The aim of the strategy is to set out a plan to guide and support the development of **research and data around children's lives** over the period of the strategy. Although a valuable document, it is disappointing that it did not prioritise research *with* children (including as peer researchers) or set out how such research might be ethically supported.

7.5 Summary of learning and way forward – Objective 5

Objective 5 under Goal 1 sought to address the need *to target additional resources and supports to enable marginalised children to participate equally* with their peers. Since the National Children's Strategy was adopted in 2000, greater knowledge has been developed around the needs of seldom-heard children and young people and capacity has been developed to engage in a more effective manner with them. The following conclusions can be drawn from the review:

- The OMCYA Inclusion Programme has resulted in particular dividends both for organisations involved in consultation with seldom-heard young people and for the DCYA itself. In particular, it has enabled capacity-building to take place, resulting in concrete results for seldom-heard children and young people, and provided important learning for participating organisations and the DCYA. The independent evaluation of the Inclusion Programme established the clear impact and need for such a dedicated support programme (McEvoy, 2009b).
- Concrete strategies and expertise of how to involve seldom-heard children and young people in the Comhairle structure have been developed.
- Consultations with seldom-heard young people have been held, also resulting in the development of resource materials.
- Several organisations in both the statutory and voluntary sectors (e.g. EPIC) advocate for marginalised children's rights as a group, but they also support them individually through providing access to complaints mechanisms.
- Important research has been undertaken with the participation of marginalised children and young people, such as those in the Children Detention School system, children and young people in State care, young carers, and children experiencing domestic violence. These studies provide important insights into young people's experiences in making their voices heard.

Learning from these achievements, the following conclusions can be made:

- The lack of a legal obligation to include children and young people's views in all law and policy-making means that certain young people face systematic barriers in a variety of settings, including the lack of access to independent guardians/advisers; the lack of effective communication and complaints mechanisms; the lack of adequate information on their rights; and the lack of independent monitoring to ensure that these rights are fulfilled.
- Given the achievements of the OMCYA Inclusion Programme, it is apparent that dedicated supports need to be put in place to support further capacity-building and networking among organisations that work with seldom-heard young people, with a view to increasing children and young people's participation in mainstream participation mechanisms. Support for non-formal mechanisms to complement the more formal structures should also be a priority in the future.

SECTION 8:
Objective 6: To support research into and evaluation of new mechanisms to give children a voice

As outlined by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (2006), evaluation and systematic monitoring of participation mechanisms, as well as making information available on these in transparent ways, are important elements of making participation processes accountable. The UN Committee further states that, ideally, monitoring and evaluation of children's participation is to be undertaken with children themselves and feedback on the outcome of their contributions provided (*ibid*, para. 134(i)).

Evaluation has become increasingly commonplace, especially in initiatives undertaken by the OMCYA, and this final section aims to detail the learning resulting from this process. Many of the examples of evaluation drawn on here have been documented in other sections – notably in Section 3 dealing with Objective 1. To avoid duplication, this material is not repeated here. However, the following particularly important examples are noted:

- Evaluations of Dáil na nÓg and Comhairle na nÓg.
- OMCYA-led consultations.
- Ombudsman for Children's Office (OCO), especially on the Youth Advisory Panel (YAP).
- The 'Getting it Together' Youth Mental Health Project.
- Youth work – the National Quality and Standards Framework.
- The Barnardos Children's IT Project.
- ISPCC evaluation of its Children Advisory Committees.

8.1   Research combined with evaluation

Examples also exist of initiatives where evaluation of a specific intervention or mechanism was combined with research. Two examples are described below.

Children and young people's participation in ethical review

Over the past 10-15 years, both nationally and internationally, children and young people have become an increasingly common subject of research undertaken by policy-makers, statutory and voluntary bodies and the academic community. This is illustrated by the range of research studies commissioned under the National Children's Strategy (*see Section 7*). This is also reflected by the OMCYA's (2009c) study into children's research and ethical review processes across Ireland. The study identified that the majority of the 72 Research Ethics Committees (RECs) in academic and non-academic institutions were concerned with children's issues. Children and young people were also consulted as part of the review process and they showed a clear understanding of concerns related to their participation in research. As a result of consultation with stakeholders, the report does not recommend the setting up of a body/single location where ethical review processes concerning children would be streamlined. However, the report demonstrates clearly how children should and could be active participants in various elements of ethical review processes, such as the establishment of guidelines on children's research for Irish RECs and the involvement of children and their parents in the design of ethical research, during the ethics review process or in the research ethics governance system. It is disappointing in this respect that this subject was not the attention of greater guidance in the *National Strategy for Research and Data on Children's Lives, 2011-2016* (DCYA, 2011d).

In the voluntary sector, the National Disability Authority, for example, has issued *Ethical Guidance for Research with People with Disabilities* to assist researchers and Research Ethics Committees to achieve good practice in their research involving people with disabilities (NDA, 2009). The guidance was drawn up through consideration of best national and international practice, alongside a process of consultation (in particular with organisations of people with disabilities and with those involved in children's research and policy development) and is designed to be used by those involved in funding, conducting or managing research that includes children with disabilities.

Child impact statements

In contrast to the development of the national set of child well-being indicators, developed by the NCO (Hanafin and Brooks, 2005), the study on *The Development and Implementation of Child Impact Statements in Ireland* (Corrigan, 2006) did not consult with children and young people, but it is interesting because it reviewed the feasibility of setting up a children's rights proofing/impact assessment mechanism in Ireland. The study considered already existing proofing mechanisms in the national context in the areas of gender, poverty, equality, environment, health and rural development, as well as children's rights proofing mechanisms in other jurisdictions. The study argues that the proofing mechanisms in the Irish context are at an early development stage and that the link between child-proofing mechanisms and resulting policy change has not been successfully proven (due to lack of experience and monitoring, as well as the impossibility to establish causality). Hence, although the National Children's Strategy made a commitment to developing child impact statements, the study does not make a recommendation on the introduction of child impact statements. By contrast, other research has shown that children's rights proofing across areas of healthcare, human rights education, alternative care, special needs, education, family support and child protection could offer an important avenue to ensure that children and children's rights are at the centre of the development and implementation of law, policy and practice in all areas affecting children (Kilkelly, 2007, p. 37).

Reviewing the international landscape, the study by Corrigan (2006) identifies that the practice of child impact assessments is only common practice in Sweden, England and Flanders (*see* Kilkelly *et al*, 2012). The following crucial issues are pointed out for a meaningful children's rights proofing mechanism: securing children's participation as part of the process; supportive systems and structures to support respective organisations in developing child impact assessments; and clarity with regard to the timing of child-proofing mechanisms (i.e. does it relate to consultation, or the planning and ex-ante development of policies and services, or is it a checklist-evaluation model?).

8.2 Summary of learning and way forward – Objective 6

Objective 6 sought to address the need *to support research into and evaluation of new mechanisms to give children a voice*. This literature review has identified the range of methodologies now used to record and communicate the views and experiences of children and young people in participation practices; research has also been used to develop new methods and techniques in this area. The review has found that:
- Organisations apply several different methodologies to monitor and evaluate children and young people's participation, including completion of evaluation sheets; interviews; focus groups; observation; follow-up interviews conducted by young people with policy-makers, reporting on their commitments; and a range of creative/participatory methodologies (e.g. sticky dots, open sky, arts-based).
- Examples exist of rigorous monitoring and evaluation design of participation policies, and the ongoing and integrated monitoring and evaluation of participation mechanisms

also appears to be particularly effective as such processes become embedded in the participation structures.

- Research undertaken on behalf of the DCYA on the impact of children and young people's participation has identified the significant benefits to the participants, their families and their communities – of their involvement in decision-making structures (Martin *et al*, 2015). This, it is hoped, will lead to the development of a research and evaluation model that will take account of children's and young people's voices, ultimately contributing significantly to the further development of this objective.
- Although the situation has improved, monitoring and evaluation of participation mechanisms and initiatives are not yet taking place systematically according to agreed standards; this results in a lack of traceability and comparability of mechanisms.
- With respect to the learning under Objective 6, it appears that different participation mechanisms and initiatives are monitored and evaluated to different degrees and that learning is not made explicit on many participation mechanisms. Moreover, the monitoring and evaluation of participation mechanisms and initiatives is not always funded and planned for as an integral element of the respective mechanisms or initiatives. Many of the identified evaluations do not make explicit how children were informed of the result of the evaluations, as well as how children were informed of the impact of their participation.

Learning from progress to date, the following conclusions can be made:

- To achieve greater implementation of participation objectives requires an evaluation culture to become embedded into participation practices.
- It is vital that the DCYA and champions in the voluntary sector continue to set the bar high in this regard by engaging in rigorous, independent evaluations of their participation work and making those findings publicly available.
- The review shows that it is vital that this is resourced as an integral part of the participation process itself.
- Linked to other findings above, it is recommended that organisations be supported through the development of an evaluation toolkit, to include best practice on how to develop monitoring and evaluation of children and young people's participation.

SECTION 9:
International Trends and Developments

This section of the literature review considers the trends and developments in the participation of children and young people in matters that affect them both nationally and in other jurisdictions. This is a limited review, designed to present a snapshot of the evidence in this area, rather than a comprehensive and detailed study of what is happening elsewhere. It is specifically designed to inform the development of a National Participation Strategy.

9.1 Developments

This short literature review of international standards and practices on children and young people's participation in decision-making affecting them demonstrates four significant interrelated developments in the last decade: (1) *critical perspectives* on children's participation reflect concern about the tokenistic character of participation responses; (2) the *conceptualisation of children's right to be heard* by academics and the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child; (3) a move from *'if'* children and young people should participate to *'how'*; and (4) most critically, a move from *hearing* to *respect for* children and young people's views, including the views of marginalised children and young people. Each is discussed in more detail below.

Critical perspectives on children's participation

Since the adoption of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1989, there has been extensive academic discussion about the concept of participation and several academics have developed models or typologies to define and describe participation. More recently, academic literature in this area has become concerned about, first, the plethora of ad hoc participation initiatives, and second, the lack of respect for children and young people's views. There have been numerous edited collections and special editions of academic journals on children's participation.[10] Commentators have questioned whether the 'honeymoon' for children's participation is over (Tisdall, 2008); others have noted, '*Even amongst the most ardent supporters of children and young people, there are concerns about tokenism, lack of impact and consultation fatigue*' (Hinton *et al*, 2008); others have deliberated on the '*gap between rhetoric and reality*' in this area (Nakar, 2007). The present review suggests a shift at practice level from 'if' children and young people should participate to 'how'.

Conceptualisations of children's right to be heard

Within the literature, there is also focus on the 'how'. As noted above, a number of academics across a range of disciplines have developed conceptual frameworks for increasing understanding of children's participation. Some commentators have focused on conceptualising children's participation with reference to Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, for example, Lundy's (2007) model of space, voice, audience and influence. Others have focused on developing assessment frameworks, for example, Shier's (2001) 'pathways to participation' has complemented existing frameworks such as Hart's (1992) infamous 'ladder of participation' and Tresder's (1997) 'degrees of participation'. Within the last decade, however, the most significant development has been the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child's General Comment No. 12 (2009) on *The right of the child to be*

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[10] See, for example: Special edition: 'Children and young people's participation in public decision-making' (2008) *International Journal of Children's Rights*, 16:281; Special edition: 'Children as social actors' (2007) *International Journal of Children's Rights*, 15:1; Special edition: 'The gap between rhetoric and reality: Critical perspectives on children's participation' (2007) *Children, youth and environments*,17:3 99; Special edition: 'The child as a citizen' (2011) *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 1:633.

heard. This provides detailed guidance on State Parties' obligations regarding children's right to be heard, most particularly 'how' children's right to be heard should be respected and ensured within the context of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).

Move from 'if' to 'how'

The third clearly discernible trend in academic and international literature in this area is the move from 'if' to 'how'. This is evidenced in four ways. First, children and young people's participation is increasingly a matter of international concern as one of the thematic children's rights priorities shared by the European Union, the Council of Europe and the United Nations (Desmet, 2010).[11] For example, Article 7(3) of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006) has incorporated the child's right to be heard. An Optional Protocol to the UNCRC enabling children to take complaints to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child has entered into force (and in 2014 was ratified by Ireland). At European level, the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights and Freedoms (enacted as part of the Lisbon Treaty) gave explicit protection in Article 24 to the right of the child to be heard in matters that affect the child. To further implementation of children's rights at EU level, the EU Commission adopted an *Agenda for the Rights of the Child* in 2011. The Council of Europe continues to pursue its agenda of *Building a Europe For and With Children* with an emphasis on standard setting. In 2010, it adopted *Guidelines on Child-friendly Justice*, designed, among other things, to enable children to participate in a more meaningful way in the justice system, and in 2011 it adopted *Guidelines on Child-friendly Healthcare*. Consultation with children and young people took place prior to the finalisation of both instruments in the first European-wide consultations of their kind (Kilkelly, 2010). In 2012, the Council of Europe adopted a Recommendation on the participation of children and young people under the age of 18 and, together with a self-assessment tool, this is designed to bring participation to the national level.

The second wave of developments in this area is taking place at national level, where participation is being systematically incorporated into new legislation relating to children in a number of jurisdictions (UNICEF, 2009; Kilkelly *et al*, 2012). This is evident across regions, from Europe and the Middle East to Africa and Asia/Pacific[12]; at all levels, from Constitutions to laws and implementing regulations[13]; and in all substantive areas affecting children, from education to children's care and protection to child justice[14]. Importantly, most of these legal instruments incorporate both children's right to express their views and also the requirement that these views be given due weight in accordance with the child's age and maturity in all matters affecting him/her.[15] In essence, State Parties to the UNCRC – in the form of Governments at national level – are taking concrete steps to implement their legal obligations under Article 12 of the Convention by giving the provision domestic legal status (Kilkelly, 2011).

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[11]   Other priorities are violence, poverty and social exclusion, and vulnerable children.

[12]   See, for example, Children's Act 2004 (England), Section 2; Care of Children Act 2004, No. 90, Section 6 (New Zealand); The Rights of the Child Act, No. 45 of 2002 (Republic of Yemen); Law of the Child, No. 21 of 2009, Section 21 (United Republic of Tanzania); Children's Act 2011, Section 5 (Zanzibar).

[13]   Regarding Constitutions, see, for example, Constitution of Kenya (2010), Section 55; Constitution of the Democratic Republic of East Timor (20 May 2002), Section 18(2). Note the former refers to children and young people's participation and the latter states, 'Children shall enjoy all rights that are universally recognised, as well as all those that are enshrined in international conventions commonly ratified or approved by the State'. Regarding laws, see Footnote 12 above. Regarding implementing regulations, see, for example, Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010, Section 9(i) of which refers to the obligation regarding the placement plan to ensure that 'children's wishes and feelings have been ascertained and given due consideration'.

[14]   See, for example, Standards in Scotland's Schools etc. Act 2000, Section 2(2); Children's Act, No. 38 of 2005 (South Africa), Section 10; Child Justice Act, No. 75 of 2008, Section 80(1) (South Africa); Children, Young Persons and Their Families Act, No. 24 of 1989, Section 5 (New Zealand).

[15]   See, for example, The Rights of the Child Act, No. 45 of 2002, Article 7 (Republic of Yemen); Child Law, No. 126 of 2008, Article 3(c) (Egypt).

Beyond law and policy prioritisation and reform, there is a move towards mainstreaming participation at implementation level. This move from 'if' is evidenced by responses for supporting the participation of children and young people in wider participation processes. For example, although not referring to children specifically, the provisions of the Local Government Act 2002 of New Zealand (Sections 78 and 82) relating to '*considering the views and preferences of persons likely to be affected*' by decisions of local authority are interpreted to include children and young people. Within the UK, the updated Code of Practice on Consultation (2009), issued by the Department of Business, Innovation and Skills, refers to extending outreach by developing '*alternative versions of consultation documents*' such as '*a young person's version*'. This move from 'if' is also evidenced by express reference to mainstreaming within policy instruments relating to children and young people's participation. The Welsh Government (2007), for example, has expressly stated that it '*is determined to ensure children and young people's participation is mainstreamed into normal business processes*'. It goes on to state: '*It is important that participation takes place across all sectors to including environment, transport, housing, play and health and not just areas traditionally associated with children and young people.*' This now complements the duty on Welsh Ministers in the Rights of Children and Young Persons (Wales) Measure 2011 to have due regard to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (including Article 12) in the exercise of their functions.

Related to the move towards mainstreaming is an emphasis on local participation (see, for example, Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, Council of Europe, 2008; Ministry of Youth Development, New Zealand, 2008). Beyond a mainstreaming tool, prioritising local participation is viewed as representing a *move to respect for children and young people's views* in so far as these decision-making processes are more accessible and more related to children and young people's lives. Finally, increasingly children and young people are invited and supported to participate in administrative decision-making affecting them, including within decision-making relating to participation. For example, most of the recent law reform processes relating to children within southern and eastern Africa have enabled participation of children and young people (Maman, 2010).

In summary, the move from 'if' to 'how' is evidenced in four ways:
- the prioritisation of children and young people's participation at international and regional level;
- incorporation of children and young people's participation into emerging legal and policy frameworks relating to children and/or participation;
- mainstreaming of children and young people's participation at local government level;
- enabling responses for children's participation within these decision-making processes.

Move from hearing to respecting children and young people's views

The move from hearing children and young people's views to showing respect for those views is indicated by emerging practices at national and international levels. From a national perspective, whilst selected practices may be viewed as well established, most are in the first stages of implementation and have not been subject to systematic monitoring processes. From an international perspective, many of these emerging national practices have shared common objectives, methodologies and substance, thereby pointing to the emergence of common international practices. This review has identified five such emerging practices, which cross-cut the objectives of Goal 1 of Ireland's National Children's Strategy: participation standards; extending children's access to information; influencing through social media and digital expression; integrated monitoring systems; and participation networks.

Participation standards

The emerging practice of establishing minimum standards for the participation of children and young people is evident within the public, voluntary and private sectors. Sometimes, these are expressly referred to as 'standards'. Other times, they are referred to as 'principles' or 'steps'. Irrespective of how they are defined, they share common objectives, design methodologies and substance, and are used as a tool for enabling participation and/or monitoring participation. The objective, for example, of many of these standards is to ensure *respect for children and young's people's views* in participation processes. For example, the *Principles of Participation* as developed by New Zealand's Ministry of Youth Development (2009) are aimed to support young people's meaningful and effective participation in decision-making across government and wider organisations. Similarly, the *Children and Young People's Participation Standards for Wales* (Welsh Government, no date) are aimed to meet one of the core aims of the Welsh Government relating to children and young people. In this respect, Core Aim 5 requires that '*all children and young people are listened to and treated with respect*' across all government and non-governmental services.

As mentioned above, the design and development of these standards share common methodologies. Firstly, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), specifically the four general principles (non-discrimination, best interests of the child, survival, and development and respect for the views of the child) are either expressly or implicitly (as evidenced by the substantive content of standards) used as a benchmark for the design and development of the standards (UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2010). For example, the *Practice Standards in Children's Participation* as developed by the Save the Children Alliance (2005) and the *Child Participation Guidelines* of the Government of Kenya expressly refer to the UNCRC. Secondly, existing participation standards refer to research on children and young people at local, regional and international levels. In this respect, the New Zealand Participation Standards refer to the Save the Children Participation Standards and research from the National Children and Youth Centre of New South Wales (1995). Thirdly, a common component of the design and development process is participation involving consultations with adults and children. The structure of the Welsh Participation Standards, for example, is expressly drawn from a consultation of children and young people, specifically children's views about what participation means to them – 'Having a voice – Having a choice' (*see below*). For children at this consultation, participation was summarised as '*my right to be involved in making decisions, planning and reviewing any action that might affect me*' (Welsh Government, no date).

Having a voice – Having a choice:
National Standards for Children and Young People's Participation (Wales)

Standard 1. Information
Standard 2. It's your choice
Standard 3. No discrimination
Standard 4. Respect
Standard 5. You get something out of it
Standard 6. Feedback
Standard 7. Improving how we work

Although locally designed and developed, the substantive content of these international standards reflect four common constituent elements:

- Firstly, they reflect that participation is a choice for the child or young person. (For example, the Standard 2 of the Welsh Participation Standard is 'It's your choice'.)
- Secondly, there is express recognition of the principle of non-discrimination. In this respect, Step 2 of the New Zealand Participation Standards includes three principles relating to identifying and supporting children from the margins to participate.
- Thirdly, it is important that participation involves the creation of a safe space and age/maturity-appropriate supportive environment for informed expression. These elements are reflected, for example, in Standards 3 and 6 of the Save the Children Participation Standards. Standard 3 is about creating a '*safe, welcoming and encouraging environment*' for children to participate and Standard 6 is about the '*development of a process-specific child protection strategy, including an accessible complaints mechanism for participating children*'.
- Fourthly, they involve the participation of children from design to monitoring and also, critically, children's entitlement to feedback about the decision-making process and outcomes, including how their views were regarded. For example, the New Zealand Participation Standards refer to '*involving young people from the beginning to the end of the process*' and '*providing young people with timely feedback about the decision-making process and how their input was used*'. Significantly, two of the seven Welsh Participation Standards relate to this fourth element: respect (Standard 4) and feedback (Standard 6). 'Respect', for example, is explained as listening to children and young people's ideas, views and experiences, taking them seriously and treating children and young people fairly. The human and financial resource implications of implementing these standards (or *respect for children and young people's views)* are expressly referred to in the New Zealand Participation Standards: the second principle of Step 1 is '*allocate adequate resources*'.

Other participation standards are more technical in nature in so far as they relate more directly to organisational objectives, methodologies and processes. For example, the *Hear by Right Standards* (Wade *et al*, 2001) outline shared values, strategy, structure, systems, members and officers, skills and knowledge, and leadership style. Nonetheless, these standards are informed from key principles of participation that mirror the above constituent elements.

Some participation standards are accompanied by toolkits to support implementation. The 9 steps to participation developed by the New South Wales Commission for Children and Young People (2004), for example, are detailed in a toolkit called *TAKING PARTicipation seriously* (*see below*).

9 steps to participation – *TAKING PARTicipation seriously* Toolkit
New South Wales Commission for Children and Young People

Step 1. Why involve kids?
Step 2. Kids have a say about different things
Step 3. Kids participate in different ways
Step 4. Helping kids to participate
Step 5. Kids have access to decision-makers
Step 6. Kids understand how decisions are made
Step 7. Kids are appreciated
Step 8. Kids feel participating is worthwhile
Step 9. Reviewing how kids' participation is working

The first two components of the *TAKING PARTicipation seriously* Toolkit are aimed generally at supporting children and young people's participation in decision-making. A series of books, published by the New South Wales Commission for Children and Young People in 2004,

provide information about steps to effective participation, monitoring participation, research, committees and meetings.

Extending children's access to information

All the emerging participation standards referred to above include information, albeit formulated in different languages. In this sense, the standards expressly recognise that informed participation is central to effective and meaningful participation. Notably, 'information' is Standard 1 in the Welsh Participation Standards. Beyond participation processes, however, there are three emerging practices relating to increasing access to information that are contributing to a move towards respect for children and young people's views.

The first emerging practice relates to the **availability of child-centred information**, extending beyond information about their rights to wider information relating to substantive issues such as health and education and/or participation options. The Internet is replete with resource guides for children and young people on their legal rights and entitlements in various jurisdictions (*see* www.crin.org). One specific example is the Youth Court of New Zealand, whose website includes information for children and young people relating to a range of issues from arrest, appearing in the Youth Court to participating in a family group conference (*see below and also* http://www.justice.govt.nz/courts/youth/information-for-young-people).

**Information for Children and Young People
(selected from Youth Court of New Zealand website)**

- If the police believe you committed a crime
- If you're a young person who hasn't been arrested
- If you're a young person who has been arrested
- If you're a young person appearing in the Youth Court
- If a social worker has to write a report about you
- If you're a young person who wants to defend their case
- If you're a young person who's been charged with a serious crime
- If you're a young person whose case is going to the District Court

Regarding participation options, the website of the New Zealand Ministry of Youth Development includes information about accessing public decision-making processes affecting children and young people (*see* 'Get your voice to parliament': http://www.myd.govt.nz/young-people/).

In this sense, there is increasing recognition that access to information is a pre-condition for enabling children and young people's participation in matters affecting them, as recognised in the Council of Europe's *Guidelines on Child-friendly Justice*.

The second emerging practice relates to the wider emerging practice of advocating **simple and accessible language** – or in the Anglophone world, plain English – so that more information is accessible to children. In this sense, there is emerging recognition that information does not necessarily have to be fun for children to be accessible, especially for older children (*see New Zealand example below*).

Related to this, non-child-related governmental and non-governmental organisations are increasingly including information for children on their websites. For example, information for young people relating to complaints about age discrimination and more general information about human rights is available on the website of the Australian Human Rights Commission (*see* http://www.humanrights.gov.au/complaints_information/young_people.html). Similarly, the website of the New Zealand Human Rights Commission includes youth resources: information is available on children and young people's rights, how to complain, sex, bullying, race and work (*see* http://www.hrc.co.nz/human-rights-environment/youth-resources/). Importantly, this information is additional to the information on children's rights on the website of the New Zealand Children's Commissioner (*see* http://www.occ.org.nz/childrens_space/about_childrens_rights).

The third emerging practice relates to a move by organisations working with and for children from adult-centred websites to **child-centred websites**. In this respect, child-centred information is available on the home page. For example, there is a link on the child-centred home page of the Scottish Commissioner for Children and Young People to 'information for adults' (*see* http://www.sccyp.org.uk/).

Influencing through social media and digital expression

In recent years, participation methodologies have extended to include the use of social media and digital expression as a tool for enabling children's expression and influence. In many respects, this is a natural consequence of the wider digital transformation of communication. Nonetheless, the choice of these participation methodologies also represents a move to respect for children and young people's views in two ways. Firstly, the emerging practice is child-centred in the sense that it reflects the extensive use of social media by children and young people, and their preference for digital expression. For example, children and young people in New Zealand requested to communicate their views about their rights to the Committee on the Rights of the Child through digital technology (Beals and Zam, 2010). Secondly, the use of social media and digital expression extends outreach. For example, text messages/SMS and Facebook were used to extend public consultation on the Child Care and Protection Bill in Namibia (*see* http://www.lac.org.na/ccpa.html).

Often, children's websites combine information with an online participation option (see, for example, Clic, a Welsh Government initiative (at time of writing, available at http://www.cliconline.co.uk/en/about/, but now discontinued). Others are connected to specific participation decision-making processes affecting children (see, for example, the online

participation process – a RIGHT blether – used by Scotland's Commissioner of Children and Young People to collate children's views about the Commissioner's priorities, available at: http://www.sccyp.org.uk/education/past-work/blether).

Integrated monitoring systems

This literature review has identified a move from ad hoc evaluations of participation processes, premised on one-time non-comparable reviews, to more integrated monitoring systems with non-negotiable transparent benchmarks and incentives for compliance. This emerging practice is intrinsically connected to the emerging participation standards. In essence, these minimum standards provided the non-negotiable transparent monitoring benchmark (IAWGCP, 2007). For example, the Welsh monitoring system has been developed to monitor compliance with the Welsh Participation Standards; for each standard, the monitoring system requires information about methods, efforts to meet the standard and areas to develop.[16] The monitoring systems, therefore, measure the conditions of engagement, entry, social support and respect, competence and reflection (Chawla, 2001). These are systems in so far as they include more than one monitoring response. For example, the Welsh system for monitoring includes a self-assessment tool, young inspectors' teams and an impact assessment tool. With respect to Standard 1 relating to 'information', the criteria and relating information required for self-assessment are detailed in the table below. The score relates to numbers of children and is classified into intending, developing and achieving. Out of 10 children and young people: 0-4 would be intending; 5-7 would be developing; and 8-10 would be achieving.

Standard 1: Information
Children and Young People's Participation Standards for Wales

Key criteria	Score	Methods and evidence to support meeting the standard	Areas to develop
We will: Ensure everyone has enough information to get properly involved. *How:* By demonstrating a minimum of three different means of circulating information to children and young people.			
We will: Let you know what difference you being involved will make. *How:* A consultation has been conducted and children and young people have provided evidence that they know what difference their being involved will make.			
We will: Inform you about who is going to listen and make changes. *How:* Clear evidence has been provided that children and young people have been informed about who will listen and make changes.			

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[16]   Self-assessment tool aims to help organisations to assess their current practice in relation to children and young people's participation and to identify and challenge the barriers preventing progress, see http://www.participationworkerswales.org.uk. For more general information, see *The National Children and Young People's Participation Standards for Wales and Impact Assessment Framework*.

The monitoring systems are integrated in two ways. Firstly, the systems are permanent and therefore subject to all organisations' participation processes and initiatives; this means that they enable progress to be tracked over time. Secondly, often the monitoring systems are applied to disparate local governmental and non-governmental organisations and therefore subject to a wide spectrum of local participation processes and initiatives. Sometimes, these organisations had been involved in the design and development of participation standards and related monitoring systems (e.g. the National Children's Participation Consortium for Wales). Alternatively, the monitoring systems are presented as a resource to support children's participation across governmental and non-governmental organisations. Monitoring, for example, is one component of the *TAKING PARTicipation Seriously* Toolkit developed by the New South Wales Commission for Children and Young People (Australia). A core component of these integrated monitoring systems is responses to ensure respect for the views of children and young people. For example, the latter toolkit includes child-centred questionnaires to monitor children and young people's views about participation supports, access to decision-makers and participation review processes.

The emergence of such integrated monitoring systems is a significant development for promoting compliance with children and young people's right to freely express their views and the obligation to ensure that these views are given due weight in accordance with their age and maturity in matters that affect them. Building on the compliance pull of peer pressure, the Welsh Consortium has developed a *National Participation Kite-mark* as an incentive for organisations to subject their organisational participation frameworks and processes to inspection, and award for compliance with the Welsh Standards. Beyond promoting compliance, such monitoring systems are significant for measuring participation processes over time and developing more effective participation processes for children and young people. For example, the monitoring system developed by the New South Wales Commission for Children and Young People – *Checking the scoreboard* – is premised on collating feedback about participation processes into participation plans with time-bound targets. For each standard, the participation plan requires information about check (information about positive participation steps), reflect (identification of opportunities for development), act (decisions relating to practical ways to implement aforesaid development opportunities) and date and person (identification of responsible actor and timeframe) (*see below*).

Participation plan – Steps to participation
New South Wales Commissioner for Children and Young People

	Check	Reflect	Act	Date and person
Step 2: Kids have say about different things				
Step 3: Kids participate in different ways				

In essence, these monitoring systems are a move to respect for children and young people's views. Nonetheless, there is also evidence that one-time monitoring responses are becoming more systematic. For example, indicators were developed to monitor the recent child participation in the law reform process in Zanzibar (Ministry of Labour, Youth, Women and Children's Development, 2010).

Participation networks

There is evidence of the establishment of participation networks for promoting respect for children and young people's views at a local level. The objective of the *Participation Works Network for England*, for example, is '*to enable organisations to effectively involve children and young people in the development, delivery and evaluation of services that affect their lives*' (*see* http://www.participationworks.org.uk/). The networks are comprised of organisations working for and with children, participation professionals and also children and young people (*see* http://www.youthinfusion.com/WhereWeAreGoing.html). They provide a forum for

interchange of knowledge and skills. Sometimes, these participation networks are aimed at promoting an interchange of knowledge and skills relating to particular groups of children and/or decision-making processes affecting children. For example, the *Young Children's Voices Network* of the UK's National Children's Bureau (*see* http://www.ncb.org.uk/areas-of-activity/early-childhood/networks/young-childrens-voices-network) was aimed at supporting local authorities in England to listen to young children's views and consider these views seriously. Beyond information-sharing, these networks provide a forum for both connecting ad hoc participation processes and consensus building as regards participation standards and monitoring systems (*see* http://www.participationworkerswales.org.uk/).

Move to respect for the views of marginalised children and young people

Beyond the express references to non-discrimination in the emerging participation standards, recent legal and policy instruments and research relating to marginalised children and young people indicate a move towards respect for their views. This is evident in four ways:

- Firstly, respect for children's views within the drafting processes. For example, children and young people's views formed a core component of decision-making relating to the drafting of the Council of Europe's *Guidelines on Child-friendly Justice* (Kilkelly, 2010).
- Secondly, regarding substantive content, express recognition of children's right to be heard as both a fundamental right and general principle of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. The latter is evident in the reference to respect for children's views within wider provisions of the instruments. For example, within the UN General Assembly's (2010) *Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children*, there are at least seven references to the participation of children and young people, albeit formulated in different language.[17]
- Thirdly, the de-linking of the obligation to ensure children's right to freely express their views from the obligation to ensure children's views are given due weight in accordance with their age and maturity reinforces the dual constituent elements of respect for children's views. Within the Council of Europe's *Guidelines on Child-friendly Justice*, for example, there are 12 references to children's views and also 6 references to the obligation to give children's views due weight, including a reference to providing children with feedback about Court rulings affecting children.[18]
- Fourthly, there is an emerging emphasis of informed expression as evidenced by express references to access to information within provisions relating to children's right to be heard. For example, within the aforementioned UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities' provision relating to children's right to be heard, there is reference to the obligation to provide 'disability and age-appropriate assistance to realise that right' (Article 7(3)).

Within recent research relating to marginalised children and young people, the move towards respect for children and young people's views is evident in the substance, method and outcomes of the research. Regarding substance, there has been a notable focus on participation within recent research on vulnerable groups of children and young people. Sometimes, there is an exclusive focus on participation. Often, the substantive content of such research is focused on collating children's views, enabling participation, mapping participation initiatives or participation as a rights-multiplier. Examples include research on the views of children in foster care (Commission for Children and Young People and Child Guardian,

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[17]   See, for example, Sections 6, 7, 49, 57, 99, 104 and 101. Regarding the determination of the best interests of the child, Section 7 states: 'The determination process should take account of, inter alia, the right of the child to be heard and to have his/her views taken into account in accordance with his/her age and maturity.'

[18]   For due weight references, see, for example, Sections 1, 2, 25, 45, 48 and 49. Regarding feedback relating to Court rulings, Section 49 states: 'Judgments and court rulings affecting children should be duly reasoned and explained to them in language that children can understand, particularly those decisions in which the child's views and opinions have not been followed.'

2010); enabling children with disabilities to participate (Lewis, 2001; Miller, 2007); mapping participation initiatives of organisations working with and for separated children (Smith, 2008); integrating participation into child protection (Willow, 2010); and how children's participation contributes to fighting poverty and social exclusion (Schuurman, 2010).

Beyond research with an exclusive participation focus, the methods and outcomes of broader research on marginalised children and young people also indicate a move towards respect for their views. A national survey conducted by Eurochild (2010) on children in alternative care included questions relating to participation; one of the outcomes of the subsequent report was the recommendation to '*ensure children with care experience and their families have a voice*'.

The emphasis on participation within these recent legal and policy frameworks and emerging research initiatives relating to marginalised children and young people reflect the primacy attached to enabling *all* children and young people to participate in matters affecting them.

9.2 Summary

Section 9 of the literature and policy review has identified a number of key initiatives and developments that provide a useful indication of trends at international and national levels to promote greater realisation of the right of children and young people to have a say in matters that affect them and have their views given due weight in line with their age and maturity. These can be summarised as follows:

- Participation, as a right of children and young people, is being expressed in national law and policy and in international instruments.
- Emphasis has shifted from *whether* the voices of children and young people should be heard to *how* to ensure that this is a reality. There is a significant trend towards developing participation standards and embedding systematic monitoring (and self-assessment) mechanisms into decision-making.
- A range of innovative methodologies are now being used to engage children and young people, including the use of social media. Information must be accessible to children and young people if they are to be facilitated to get involved.
- There is a discernible move towards mainstreaming – where participation becomes the norm in all areas affecting children and young people's lives – and towards participation at the local rather than the national level.
- In essence, these emerging participation practices represent the beginning of the move from 'if' to 'how' to respect children and young people's views in other jurisdictions and internationally.

SECTION 10:
Conclusions

10.1   Aims of the literature review

Goal 1 of the National Children's Strategy (2000-2010) is 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*'. Under Goal 1 of the strategy, there are six objectives:

1. To put in place new mechanisms in the public sector which achieve participation by children in matters which affect them.
2. To promote and support the development of a similar approach in the voluntary and private sectors.
3. To ensure that children are made aware of their rights and responsibilities.
4. To support children and organisations to make the most of the new opportunities to be provided.
5. To target additional resources and supports to enable marginalised children to participate equally.
6. To support research into and evaluation of new mechanisms to give children a voice.

This study was commissioned in 2011 to assist with the review of the first National Children's Strategy and to document some of the learning in advance of the new National Policy Framework for Children and Young People (now known as *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* and launched in 2014 by the DCYA). In particular, this research sought to identify from the policy and from the literature:

- developments on implementation and progress under Goal 1 of the National Children's Strategy;
- challenges and gaps emerging from implementation of Goal 1;
- national and international best practice on children and young people's participation.

In this way, the review sought to identify the learning from efforts to implement Goal 1 of the National Children's Strategy in the last decade to be applied to the development and implementation of Goal 1 in the National Policy Framework. A key part of this process was to develop the National Participation Strategy, designed to underpin *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures*.

Sections 3-8 in this report detail the measures adopted in pursuit of the six objectives of Goal 1 and present an analysis, based on the literature, of the extent to which the objectives have been achieved. Each section draws conclusions on the progress made and the gaps that remain to be filled. Section 9 marks out international trends and developments. It is not proposed to reiterate the conclusions and recommendations of each section here. The aim of this overall concluding section is to link this learning with the draft National Participation Strategy, to highlight the elements that the strategy needs to contain if the progress achieved is to be sustained and built upon.

10.2   Lessons for the National Participation Strategy

A review of the policy and research literature from Ireland and elsewhere suggests that a number of elements need to be in place to ensure that the voices of children and young people will be heard by those who work with and for them. These elements, described below, highlight the elements to be given consideration in the proposed National Participation Strategy to advance the participation of children and young people in decision-making.

Law and policy base

- The literature review shows that giving participation a strong legislative, even Constitutional basis, is an important foundation for the development of policy in this area and ultimately leads to the implementation of participation in practice. The lack of a coherent legal framework for participation needs to be addressed in the National Participation Strategy, which should undertake to review and address the current legal provision in this area. Even without coherent legislative provision, the literature review shows that strong policy can still provide significant impetus and support to those who work in this area and can help to promote participation at all levels. The articulation of Goal 1 in the National Children's Strategy provides evidence of this. *The Agenda for Children's Services* (linking with Goal 3 of the strategy) puts the child at the centre of policy and practice in this area and identifies 'participation' as one of the seven national service outcomes relevant to developing, delivering, monitoring and evaluating children's services. Accordingly, the National Participation Strategy needs to build on these policies to articulate a clear and more detailed vision for the way in which decisions affecting the lives of children and young people are made, i.e. by including them in that process. The National Participation Strategy should aim to develop a coherent legal and policy basis for the participation of children and young people in all matters affecting them. Moreover, although there is already some cross-referencing between policy instruments, the National Participation Strategy needs to promote more systematic linkages between Goal 1 of the National Children's Strategy (and now the National Policy Framework) and other policies concerning children directly and indirectly.

Leadership and support

- The literature review shows the clear merits of having a central unit within a Government department that has responsibility and dedicated resources for undertaking and supporting participation work. The DCYA Participation Support Team, together with various stakeholders and committees, has been very successful in undertaking and facilitating consultations with children and young people, and in developing local and national structures to ensure the voices of children and young people are heard by decision-makers. The DCYA has built up a wealth of experience and expertise in this area and much of its work has been undertake in collaboration with partners in the statutory and voluntary sectors. It has shown a commitment to the evaluation of this work and to practices that are inclusive, led by child and young people, and connect children and young people with decision-makers. Although the consultations undertaken with children and young people have been published, more needs to be done to place the Participation Support Unit's expertise and learning in the public domain and at the disposal of those in other Government departments and in the voluntary sector who would benefit from it.

- It is recommended that the National Participation Strategy formally identifies the DCYA Participation Support Team as a 'champion' and leader in the area of children and young people's participation. This would require it to be sufficiently resourced to enable it to develop into a central hub or one-stop-shop for children and young person's participation. This would also allow the Participation Support Team to lead the implementation of what is now Goal 3 of the National Policy Framework by establishing and disseminating best practice in participation. It should also enable its emphasis to shift away from undertaking participation itself towards supporting and facilitating participation initiatives undertaken by other Government departments and agencies. In addition to providing practical support and training to such organisations and departments, the Participation Support Team could act as a central repository to the wide range of initiatives and developments that, as the literature review shows, are ongoing in the voluntary and statutory sectors, but which are largely unconnected. Under the National Participation Strategy, the Participation Support Team could identify champions in other Government departments and agencies and in the voluntary and private sectors, highlight positive initiatives and practices, and support the

active networking of departments and organisations (perhaps introducing a system of buddy or peer support) so that those with more experience in this area, using innovative approaches, could share their expertise and learning with the less experienced. The development and support of existing participation structures – at local and national level – should also fall within its remit. The Participation Support Team, together with the proposed National Participation Strategy Implementation Group (*see below*), could provide an overarching framework for participation structures at local level, promoting the application of best practice approaches and facilitating networking so that learning can be shared horizontally as well as vertically.

- In order to ensure that the implementation of the National Participation Strategy is a priority across all Government departments and agencies and that participation is mainstreamed across the public sector, it is recommended that a formal, high-level group be established to oversee the delivery of its goals. This National Participation Strategy Implementation Group should have representation from all Government departments, as well as agencies like Tusla – Child and Family Agency, An Garda Síochána, the Irish Sports Council and the Arts Council. Representation from the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (outside of the Participation Unit) should be involved, along with representation from other statutory bodies like the Adoption Authority and the Courts Service to ensure that participation in the legal system is addressed. Given its central role in children and young people's participation, consideration should be given to including representation from the Ombudsman for Children's Office. The Implementation Group should be charged with responsibility for implementing and overseeing the National Participation Strategy. To this end, it should also focus on raising awareness, building capacity and the communication of best practice in participation across all Government departments and agencies. Rolling membership (which might change depending on the area or issues being addressed) might be necessary to ensure that the group is a workable size. The voluntary sector might also be included as appropriate.

Structures to enable participation

- The literature review shows that in other jurisdictions focus has increasingly been placed on the establishment of participation structures at local level. In Ireland, the literature review has identified significant progress in the establishment of structures both at national level (including Dáil na nÓg and advisory committees for the Department of Children and Youth Affairs and the Ombudsman for Children's Office) and at local level (predominantly the Comhairle na nÓg) to ensure that children's voices are heard in all matters affecting them. This work has enabled young people to advocate on behalf of their peers and its peer-led qualities should be promoted in the National Participation Strategy.

- According to the literature, participation structures have benefited from regular independent evaluation, dedicated and ring-fenced financial support and an overarching committee to drive progress forward in a coherent and structured manner. Comhairle na nÓg, in particular, has benefited from shadowing adult structures in the form of the City/County Development Boards and the National Participation Strategy needs to reflect plans to link the Comhairlí with the Children and Young People's Services Committees and possibly other structures, including schools (e.g. student councils), local policing boards and local sports partnerships. This would help to ensure that local services are informed by the views and experiences of children and young people and, conversely, that children and young people are consulted about their lived lives. It is also important that such local structures be linked together by a peer network and common branding to increase awareness among others about their work.

Education and information

- Education and information are both key to greater implementation of Goal 1 in many ways. For children and young people, awareness about their right to have their voices heard is an important first step to realising their right to participate. For adults, awareness about the merits of children and young people's participation is crucial to underpin and advocate for successful participation practice. Of course, as the literature review shows, participation practices are themselves awareness-raising. However, there is a need for a broader information campaign to sensitise the public in general and decision-makers in particular to the importance of listening to children and young people and the value of their contributions. Those engaged in participation initiatives need to communicate more widely and more effectively on the nature of their work and its impact. In this way, the review indicates that the learning, experience and expertise of those engaged with the participation agenda need to be more widely disseminated.

- To this end, the Department of Children and Youth Affairs needs to develop a coherent communication strategy aimed at disseminating the achievements of participation initiatives, raising awareness about the participation structures and making best practice on participation widely available. The literature review also demonstrates the merits of professional training on participation methodologies and approaches, and the development of further specific toolkits (like the *Youth Café Toolkit*) to support the implementation of best practice in participation. The incorporation of children's rights, including the right to be heard, into the school curriculum needs to be accelerated. In the same way, the training curricula of all professionals who work with and for children need to include specific information and tailored training programmes on how to promote children and young people's participation in their work.

- The review highlighted the emphasis in other jurisdictions on making information accessible to children and young people through the use of websites, social media and digital resources. This is becoming apparent in Ireland also, although many organisations have yet to fully appreciate and prioritise the importance of communicating with children and young people in a language and style that is both comprehensible and engaging for them. Overall, organisations need to give greater priority to making their websites more accessible to children and young people and should be supported in doing so by the Participation Support Team, who might consider developing a specific toolkit to this end.

10.3   Challenges for the National Participation Strategy

In addition, this literature review has highlighted a number of challenges that need to be faced if participation is to be mainstreamed, inclusive and effective in ensuring the voices of children and young people are heard in matters that affect them.

Mainstreaming

- The literature review has established that most of the expertise and experience in children and young people's participation is currently centralised in the Participation Support Team of the Department of Children and Youth Affairs. At the same time, there are various initiatives and other developments taking place across the statutory and voluntary sectors, but many of these are ad hoc and uncoordinated. The proposal (*above*) to establish the Participation Support Team as a national hub for information on the participation of children and young people could also incorporate the establishment of a central repository to bring together information about all the ongoing initiatives and events.

- Mainstreaming is essential to ensure the full implementation of participation objectives across all Government activity. To enable mainstreaming to be effective, the relevance and importance of the participation agenda must be understood by all those who work with and for children in the statutory sector, directly and indirectly. A variety of mechanisms and approaches are necessary to achieve this goal. The National Participation Strategy Implementation Group could be central to achieving this objective.

- Further to the goal of mainstreaming participation, consideration should be given across Government to developing ways of offering incentives for the participation of children and young people, perhaps through the adoption of an accreditation system or self-assessment toolkits. As the literature review found, such mechanisms have proven effective in embedding participation as part of organisational best practice in Ireland and elsewhere. Using the leverage of funding to require monitoring and reporting of participation should also be explored. Engaging with the Council of Europe on this issue may be useful.

Evaluation and achieving impact

- The literature review noted that developments have increasingly focused on making participation count by ensuring that the views of children and young people inform decision-making. This has increasingly become a trend in Ireland also; as the literature review shows, many participation initiatives (consultation events, the work of Dáil and Comhairle na nÓg) are having a direct impact at local and national level on decisions that affect the lives of children and young people. Furthermore, an evidence base is gradually being developed through research – much of which is currently underway – which aims to assess the impact of participation work both on children and young people themselves and on decision-makers. To further the emphasis on respect for the views of children and young people evident in other jurisdictions, the National Participation Strategy needs to establish as a clear priority that the views of children and young people have an impact on matters that affect them, including in particular that they inform the design and delivery of services. It needs to recognise that building a case for participation requires strong supporting evidence, notwithstanding that under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child it is a right of children and young people.

- Evaluation is a vital part of establishing impact and the literature review shows the importance of embedding evaluation in all participation practices, through dedicated funding, whether they are once-off or ongoing initiatives. Evaluation can have a positive effect on the operation of participation structures and the review highlights the extent to which it helps to promote reflexive learning and improvements in participation practice. For this reason, a commitment to evaluation must be a strategic priority in the National Participation Strategy, which should prioritise the independent and systematic evaluation of each consultation process/participation initiative, together with the recording and auditing of outcomes and impact.

Inclusive participation

- The literature review identified that genuinely inclusive participation remains a significant challenge, although dedicated efforts to address this issue, like the Inclusion Programme, have been effective in ensuring that a broader and more diverse range of children and young people are heard by decision-makers and the public. As the review established, emphasis in other jurisdictions has shifted to the inclusion of marginalised or seldom-heard groups. The National Participation Strategy needs to address this area also by mandating a renewed focus on the inclusion of children and young people from all backgrounds and by diversifying the ways in which children and young people are currently involved in matters that affect them. This should include specific initiatives to involve especially vulnerable groups, like those in the criminal justice system and children with disabilities,

while also engaging children less likely to be involved in formal structures via a variety of informal mechanisms and approaches. The use of social media could be an important way to develop in this context and more generally. Raising awareness about the importance of participation and its many merits is also key to addressing the inclusion challenge in the long term.

10.4 Summary

As the various sections of this literature review show, practices and approaches that ensure that the voices of children and young people are heard by decision-makers are increasing in number and quality all the time. It is reassuring to note that the trends in other jurisdictions are discernible from the Irish research and policy review – for example, Ireland shares the international emphasis on mainstreaming, on local participation and a renewed focus on ensuring that participation initiatives have an impact on decision-making that affects the lives of children and young people.

With its policy base – the identification of Goal 1 is itself a significant achievement – and the experience and expertise of the last decade, Ireland can now begin to build on the foundation of the first National Children's Strategy by developing a National Participation Strategy that is more specific, measurable and achieves real progress. The goal must ultimately be to embed participation as a cultural value both in Irish law and policy, and in the practice of those in the public and voluntary sectors who work with and for children and young people directly and indirectly.

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