

Including young people on Committees

A brief guide for government departments and agencies

National Participation Office

of the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth



An Roinn Leanaí, Comhionannais,
Míchumais, Lánpháirtíochta agus Óige
Department of Children, Equality,
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1 Introduction

This document has been developed by the National Participation Office of the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration, and Youth.

The purpose of this document is to provide guidance, practical advice and useful sign-posting to government departments and agencies who wish to involve children and young people in Committees.

2 Policy Context

Children have a right to participate in matters that affect their lives. The ratification of the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child in 1992 demonstrates Ireland's commitment to ensuring that the voices of children and young people are heard and given due weight in matters that affect them. Evidence has demonstrated the impact of involving young people in decision making including improved services, policies and society as a whole.

The importance of having respect for the views of children and young people is also captured in national level policy documents. The recently published [Blueprint of the Policy Framework for Children and Young People](#) notes the following:

Children and young people are experts in their own lives and wellbeing. Policy and decision makers must consider and take into account the views of children and young people in all matters affecting them, promote the free expression of children and young people's views, and provide appropriate opportunities for children and young people to be heard. Particular care must be taken to ensure the views of particularly vulnerable cohorts of children and young people, including those at key transition points in their lives, are respected and taken into account.

The [National Framework for Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-making](#) provides guidance for decision makers on the steps to take in giving children and young people a meaningful voice in decision making.

3 Key considerations when including children and young people on Committees

3.1 Child Safeguarding

The safety and welfare of children and young people is paramount when involving children and young people on Committees. Guidance on this can be found in [Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children](#) (Children First). It is advisable that, at a minimum, the main organiser of the Committee completes the [Children First E-Learning Programme](#).

A key part of ensuring good practice in child safeguarding includes identifying a [Designated Liaison Person \(DLP\)](#). This person will be the resource for any Committee member who has child protection concerns and will liaise with the relevant outside agencies. The DLP should be knowledgeable about child protection and receive child safeguarding training.

The name and contact details of the DLP should be made available to all Committee members. It may be useful to have a deputy DLP appointed to your Committee who will assume responsibility when the DLP is not available to attend the Committee or is on leave.

3.2 GDPR and Data Protection

Organisations should ensure that their guiding principles and child safeguarding procedures are consistent with the [General Data Protection Regulation 2018](#) (GDPR) and with the Data Protection Act 2018.

4 Initial Considerations

Initial points to consider before young people are invited to join a Committee:

- Is there an understanding on why the voice of children and young people is needed on the Committee?
- How will including the voice of young people on your Committee make a difference?
- What topics or themes are being discussed that are of relevance to young people?
- What are the demographic of young people to be on the Committee (age, gender, location, and ethnicity)?
- How will membership of the Committee be made accessible to young people? (i.e. venue, format of meeting, time meeting is held)
- How will a young person's membership be kept meaningful and relevant to matters affecting their lives and are their mitigation factors to ensure a young person does not feel overwhelmed at Committee meetings? (see [5.1](#) for risk examples)
- Is the topic and setting age appropriate for a young person? E.g. themes discussed, age appropriate language, venue the meeting is held in, appropriate sharing of personal details/contact information. This needs to be clear to and agreed by all Committee members.
- How will child safeguarding be managed when a child or young person joins the Committee? Nominate or identify a designated liaison person in the organisation or on the Committee, who has completed the [Children First E-Learning Programme](#).
- If the expected lifetime of the Committee extends beyond 3 months consideration should be given to inviting two young people to join so that they could attend together or attend alternatively or as substitutes for each other, if appropriate.
- A separate Committee Operating Protocol (see [7.2](#)) should be considered, to be shared with all Committee members, including young people, outlining expected behaviour when young people are present at meetings. An example of an operating protocol is attached at [Appendix 3](#).

5 Risk Assessment

Before commencing the process of inviting a young person onto a Committee, it is advisable to do a risk assessment to pre-empt potential risks with regards to child safeguarding and put mitigating supports in place.

Please see below sample risk assessment and mitigations.

5.1 Risk assessment ahead of Committee meeting

- Potential absence of any attendee with sufficient safeguarding training.
- Appropriate consent/assent procedures not in place prior to first meeting.
- Adult members of Committee directly engaged with young members outside confines of meeting.
- Potential for youth members feeling overwhelmed or unable to fully participate if not sufficiently prepared for each meeting.

5.2 Potential Risk Mitigation Measures

- More than one adult member of the Committee (the DPL) could complete the [Children First E-Learning Programme](#) (e.g. Chair and Secretary). On foot of this training, trained Committee members will address potential safeguarding issues in the event of absence of the Designated Adult Members.
- Appropriate consent/assent forms for each young member must be signed ahead of first meeting.
- If an Operating Protocol document is developed the following clauses should be included:
 - *no member of the Committee is to attempt to directly engage with young members outside the confines of the meeting, they should raise the matter with the lead designated adult members who will access such requests and relay them to the relevant young person if deemed appropriate.*
 - *Email addresses for young members will be held by the lead organiser of the Committee who holds consent and assent forms. All youth members will be bcc'd on relevant communications to ensure that email addresses of youth members are not shared with other members.*
- Where possible, seek support of youth organisation to facilitate a preparatory meeting for the youth cohort in advance of each Committee meeting, or as required. This will give the

young members an opportunity to review the agenda for the meeting and any relevant documentation to be discussed.

6 Recruitment of young people onto a Committee

Local Comhairle na nÓg, youth organisations or schools/third level institutions may offer support on recruitment of relevant young people. It may also be possible for local youth organisations or schools to provide support to young people attending, depending on the work and purpose of the Committee.

A typical process would involve issuing an email call out to youth organisation/school/ third level institutions or specific support organisations relevant to the work of the Committee, outlining:

- the purpose of the Committee
- the reason why you are seeking young people to be part of the Committee
- the age group you wish to reach
- the geographical location the young people come from, if this is relevant
- the gender of the young person, if a balance is required
- the commitment the young people are being asked to give-for example the expected duration of the Committee and anticipated number of meetings, format-in person or online, location of meeting if in person etc.
- availability of financial assistance to cover travel costs of young people, if applicable.

You will also need to specify how you will select young people. This may be:

- through a random selection from all expressions of interest received, **or**
- by asking nominating organisations to request young people to fill out an application form with set criteria, which will be evaluated by a panel, **or**
- another method suited to your Committee.

Your selection process should be fully transparent when the call out is issued.

When the young members have been selected, you can ask the nominating organisations to inform the young people who have been successful of the outcome, and request them to complete the [consent/assent](#) forms, which you will supply.

7 Committee membership

Once a child or young person has accepted an invitation to join a Committee:

- Young people should be provided with the Terms of Reference of the group. This should be written in plain English language. This should also include the scope of the work and how feedback will be given to the young person on the influence they have on decision making processes.
- For Committee members under 18 years parental or guardian consent is required as well as the young person's assent. If the young person is over 18 they can provide their own consent.
- The Designated Liaison Person on the Committee must be identified to the young person/people and the role this person has explained.
- Arrangements to provide financial assistance to young people to cover costs of travel to attend in person meetings should be clearly explained to the young people selected and /or their nominating organisation.
- Young people should be asked if they require any supports to attend and contribute to meetings.
- All young people should be informed that their participation is voluntary and they can withdraw at any time.

7.1 Supports for young people to attend meetings

If a young person needs particular supports to attend or participate in a meeting, you need to consider how these can best be provided (e.g. wheelchair access, hearing technology, accessible documentation). In addition:

- Every effort should be made to ensure that meetings are accessible and inclusive for children and young people's individual needs.
- It is important to communicate with the child or young person or their parent or guardian in advance of the meeting to find out if particular accessibility supports are required.
- It is advised to share the topic and the questions with children or young people in advance of the consultation and to use plain and clear language throughout the process.

7.2 Committee Operating Protocol document

Consideration can be given to developing an additional 'Operating Protocol' document to outline the expected behaviour of adult Committee members when children and young people are Committee members. This requires the agreement of all Committee members and covers contact with young people outside meetings, use of young people's contact details, dispute resolution among Committee members, and agreement on use of respectful language etc. Example document provided at [Appendix 3](#).

8 Considerations after each Committee Meeting

- Provide young people with accessible, timely feedback on key developments.
- Provide an opportunity for young people to evaluate the process during the lifetime of the Committee and when its time span is complete, verbally or through a feedback form.

9 Useful Resources

[Guidance for Children and Young People's Services Committees \(CYPSC\) on participation by children and young people in decision making 2018](#)

This document provides practical steps in engaging children and young people in decision making.

[Guide to child friendly communication at events](#)

This guide was written by Dr Michelle Templeton and Prof Laura Lundy of the Centre for Children's Rights at Queen's University Belfast, working in Collaboration with Eurochild and young people who shared their experiences of participation when attending meetings with adults. The accessibility of the document was ensured by the Publications Office of the European Union.

[Hub na nÓg](#)

Hub na nÓg is a national centre of excellence and coordination on giving children and young people a voice in decision-making. Hub na nÓg supports Government Departments, State agencies and non-government organisations to give children and young people a voice in decision-making with a particular focus on those that are seldom-heard. They also provide training, coaching, development, advice and support to organisations to more effectively listen to and act on the voices of children and young people.

[Tusla 2019: Child Safeguarding: A Guide for Policy, Procedure and Practice 2nd Edition](#)

This document is designed as a best practice guide to help anyone who provides a service to children and families to develop guiding principles and child safeguarding procedures to keep children and young people using their services safe from harm.

Appendix 1

Sample Parental Consent Form (under 18)

[INSERT ORGANISATION'S NAME] PARENT/GUARDIAN CONSENT FORM FOR YOUNG PEOPLE UNDER 18

Date: _____

Place: _____

Time: _____

Committee Information:

[Insert information about the Committee- what is the purpose of the Committee, who is organising it etc. what organisations/groups are attending, who is the Designated Liaison person for the young person- provide name, title and number]

Detail of Young Person:

Name of Young Person	
Address of Young Person	
Date of Birth of Young Person	
Age of Young Person	
Dietary Requirements (If in-person)	
Is there any other relevant information (medical conditions or special needs) that we need to be aware of?	

Contact Details of Parent/Guardian/Care Worker

Name of Parent/Guardian/Care Worker	
Relationship to Young Person	
Address	
Parent/Guardian/Care Worker Contact Number	
Contact Details of Person Collecting the Young Person (if different from above)	
In Case of Emergency, Please Contact (if different from above)	

Please Read and Give Permission for the Points Below:

Please Read and Give Permission for the Points Below That You Consent to:

☐ I give permission for the young person named above to take part in the Committee with
on _____ [DATE]

☐ I understand that there will be a Designated Liaison person at the Committee meeting

☐ I understand that no responsibility will be taken during the process of travelling to and from the Committee meetings

☐ I understand that my child is taking part voluntarily.

☐ In keeping with Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children 2017, I understand that if the Designated Liaison person learns about any danger to the safety of my child or another young person, they will pass that information to the relevant agencies.

☐ I agree that photographs of the young person named above can be used for publicity and promotional purposes and in printed and online reports with the permission of the young person.

Signed..... (Parent/Guardian/Care Worker)

Date:

Please insert your own organisations' GDPR or data protection statement or information as relevant here

Sample Young Person Consent Form (over 18)

[INSERT ORGANISATION'S NAME] CONSENT FORM FOR YOUNG PEOPLE OVER 18 YEARS OF AGE

Date: _____

Place: _____

Time: _____

Committee Information:

[Insert information about the Committee- what is the purpose of the Committee, who is organising it etc. what organisations/groups are attending, who is the Designated Liaison person for the young person- provide name, title and number]

Information About You:

Your Name	
Your Address	
Your Date of Birth	
Your Age	
Your Phone Number	
Your Email Address	
Dietary Requirements (if in-person consultation)	
Is there any other relevant information (medical conditions or special needs) that we need to be aware of?	
Emergency Contact (Name and contact number)	

Please Read and Give Permission for the Points Below:

- ☐ I agree to take part in the Committee on _____. [DATE]
- ☐ I understand that I am taking part voluntarily.
- ☐ In keeping with Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children 2017, I understand that if the facilitators learn about any danger to the safety to any child or young person, they will pass that information to the relevant agencies.
- ☐ I agree that photographs can be used for publicity and promotional purposes and in printed and online reports.

Signed: Date:

Please insert your own organisations' GDPR or data protection statement or information as relevant here

Appendix 2

Sample Young Person Assent Form (under 18)

[INSERT ORGANISATION'S NAME] ASSENT FORM FOR YOUNG PEOPLE UNDER 18 Years

Date: _____

Place: _____

Time: _____

Committee Information:

[Insert information about the Committee- what is the purpose of the Committee, who is organising it etc. what organisations/groups are attending, who is the Designated Liaison person for the young person- provide name, title and number]

Your Details:

Your Name	
Your Address	
Your Date of Birth	
Your Age	
Dietary Requirements (if in-person)	
Is there any other relevant information (medical conditions or special needs) that we need to be aware of?	

Please Read and Give Permission for the Points Below:

- ☐ I understand why I have been invited to sit on the Committee.
- ☐ I agree to take part in Committee meetings on _____ [DATE].
- ☐ I agree that photographs can be used for publicity and promotional purposes and in printed and online reports.

☐ I understand that I do not have to take part if I do not want to and my participation is voluntary

☐ In keeping with *Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children* 2017, I understand that if the designated liaison contact on the Committee learn about any danger to the safety to any child or young person, they will pass that information to the relevant agencies.

Signed:

Date:

Appendix 3

Sample Operating Protocol

It is advised that you provide all Committee members an operating protocol in advance of commencing a Committee meeting. Below is a sample of what to include in your operating protocol in terms of code of conduct. You may need to add/ adapt this to suit your Committee needs.

Code of Conduct:

- The business of the Steering Committee will be conducted in a spirit of collaborative co-operation.
- The Chair of the Steering Committee will encourage open discussion between all members, within an environment of dignity and respect. Any debate or disagreement that arises must be handled in an appropriate, courteous and constructive fashion.
- The presence of children/young people at the Steering Committee emphasises the importance of all members conducting themselves according to the highest standard of professional behaviour.
- In order to safeguard Steering Committee members, both adults and young persons, no adult member of the Steering Committee is to attempt to directly engage with the youth members of the Steering Committee.
- If any adult Steering Committee member wishes to engage with the youth members, outside the confines of the Steering Committee or Sub-Committee meetings, they should raise that matter with the National Participation Office – who will assess such requests and relay them to the relevant young person (if they so deem it appropriate).
- Members should take into account their own biases and subjective concerns, and at all times endeavour to be open towards, and considerate of, the perspectives and views of their fellow members of the Steering Committee.
- Inform Committee if unable to attend meetings.
- We do not recommend that any social media platforms for Committee members are set up.
- Do not use social media to discuss other Committee members
- Committee members are encouraged to participate at a level they feel comfortable with.

- Make any concerns you have known and have these addressed in an appropriate manner.

Operating Protocol Clauses

- No member of the Committee is to attempt to directly engage with young members outside the confines of the meeting, they should raise the matter with the lead designated adult members who will access such requests and relay them to the relevant young person if deemed appropriate.
- Email addresses for young members will be held by the lead organiser of the Committee who holds consent and assent forms. All youth members will be bcc'd on relevant communications to ensure that email addresses of youth members are not shared with other members.

The Operating Protocol should include the name of the Committee and the date it was finalised and became operational.



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