



An Roinn Leanaí, Comhionannais,
Míchumais, Lánpháirtíochta agus Óige
Department of Children, Equality,
Disability, Integration and Youth

Report on the Public Consultation on the next Government Policy Framework for the Participation of Children and Young People in Decision-making

Final Report November 2023

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Abbreviations

AAC	Alternative and Augmentative Communication
BOM	Board of Management
CNN	Comhairle na nÓg
CPD	Continuing Professional Development
CPE	Continuing Professional Education
CRIA	Children's Rights Impact Assessment
CYPD	Children Young People with Disabilities
CYPSC	Children and Young People's Services Committees
DCEDIY	Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth
DCYA	Department of Children and Youth Affairs (Now DCEDIY)
DE	Department of Education
DEIS	Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools
DOE	Department of Education
DFHERIS	Dept. of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science
DHH	Deaf and Hard of Hearing Children
DPER	Department of Public Expenditure and Reform
DPO	Disabled Persons Organisations
EAL	English as Additional Language
EPSEN	Education for persons with special educational needs
ESD	Education for sustainable development
ETB	Education and Training Board
FE	Further Education
FET	Further Education and Training
HE	Higher Education
HIQA	Health Information and Quality Authority
HNN	Hub na nÓg
HSE	Health Service Executive
ID	Intellectual Disability
ISSU	Irish Second Level Students' Union
ITE	Initial Teacher Education
LCDC	Local Community Development Committee
NABMSE	National Association of Boards of Management in Special Education
NCCA	National Council for Curriculum and Assessment
NCSE	National Council for Special Education
NDA	National Disability Association
NYCI	National Youth Council of Ireland
OCO	Ombudsman for Children's Office
PDST	Professional Development Service for Teachers
PPI	Public and Patient Involvement
PL	Professional Learning
SEN	Special Educational Needs
SICAP	Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme
SPC	Strategic Policy Committees

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1. Background

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1.1 Introduction to the consultation

In December 2022, the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY), Roderic O’Gorman, launched a public consultation on the next Government Policy Framework for the Participation of Children and Young People in Decision-making.

The purpose of the consultation was to secure the views and opinions of the public to help inform the next Policy Framework for Children and Young People’s Participation in Decision-making in Ireland. This policy framework will build on the achievements of the National Strategy for Children and Young People’s Participation in Decision-making 2015-2020 (The Strategy). The Strategy was guided and influenced by Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, which ensures the right of the child to have their views heard and given due weight in all matters that affect them. The Strategy is primarily aimed at children and young people under the age of 18, but also includes the voice of young people in the transition to adulthood.

The Strategy set out commitments across the whole of government to ensure that children and young people were included in decision-making:

- in their local communities
- in early education, schools and the wider formal and non-formal education systems
- in decisions that affect their health and well-being, including on the health and social services delivered to them
- in the courts and legal system.

Additionally, the Strategy set out commitments to ensure:

- that children and young people are consulted or otherwise included in decision-making in the development of policy, legislation and research, and
- that there is leadership in place to support this work, including education and training for professionals working with and on behalf of children and young people.

1.2 The consultation approach

The public were offered two options to share their views.

1.2.1 Option 1: Open Submissions

The open submissions were in the form of a written submission which could be put forward on an individual’s behalf, or on behalf of an organisation. Submissions could be made in Irish or in English. The open submission was live for eight weeks (from 1st December 2022 to 23rd Jan 2023).¹

1.2.2 Option 2: DCEDIY Online Survey

The second option was the completion of an online questionnaire² hosted on the EU Survey platform. The online survey was live for eight weeks (from 1st December 2022 to 23rd Jan 2023).

Information on the consultation and how to participate was hosted on the DCEDIY’s [gov.ie page](#). DCEDIY shared the invitation to submit submissions and web link with the Participation Network which includes government departments, state agencies, NGOs, academics, researchers and others. The web link was also shared via the DCEDIY’s and Hub na nÓg’s Twitter accounts.

¹ The original closing date for submissions was 5th January 2023 but this was extended to 23rd of January 2023.

² <https://ec.europa.eu/eusurvey/runner/participationpolicyframework>

2. Findings from the written submissions

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Given the different methodologies and consultation questions, the messages from the three consultations are presented separately before providing a summary of the key messages from the three approaches.

2.1 Overview of the template for the written submissions

The open submission template had five questions (see Box 1) and asked respondents not to exceed 2,000 words.

Box 1: Open Submission Questions

1. What is working well in how children and young people are supported to participate in decision-making in Ireland in all matters that affect them?
2. What is not working well in how children and young people are supported to participate in decision-making in Ireland in all matters that affect them?
3. What needs to change in how children and young people are supported to participate in decision-making in Ireland in all matters that affect them?
4. How can government remove barriers so that all children and young people can equally participate in decision-making in all matters that affect them and in the services they receive from the state?
5. What top priorities should the new policy framework focus on?

2.2 Analysis of written submissions

Only fifteen of the written submissions provided responses to all questions using the template. Where submissions did not use the template but provided detailed responses, the report writer drew out the key messages under the relevant headings.

Nineteen submissions (from parents) sent the same document in their response. In the analysis this was treated as one document.

Submissions from organisations

- Nine came from a government department (n=1) or statutory organisations/agencies (n=8).
- Nine were from national organisations (non-government).
- Five were from non-governmental organisations.
- Two were from unions (teacher/student).

Taken together the written submissions from organisations had a specific focus on³:

- Education (early years, primary, secondary, FET) (n=10)
- Disability/special education needs (n=4)
- Youth services (n=3)
- Views of parents (n=3)

³ Please note numbers exceed 25 as some submissions had a focus on more than one population/issue.

- Children and young people in care (n=2)
- Gender identity (n=2)
- Irish language (n=1)
- Creative arts (n=1)
- Youth justice (n=1)
- Children's rights (n=1)

The written submissions from individuals/parents had a focus on:

- Parental consent/The voice of parents in decision-making/Voice of CYP via parents (n=2 individual submissions/n=19 same response)
- Importance of family (n=19 same response)
- Voice and 'best interests' (n=1)
- Gender identity (n=2 individual submissions/n=19 same response)
- Voice of CYP in primary school (n=2)
- The voice of seldom-heard (n=2)

2.3 Messages from written submissions

The key messages from the written submissions are presented in five sections.

- What is working well?
- What is not working well?
- What needs to change in how children and young people are supported to participate in decision-making?
- How can the Government remove the barriers so that **all children and young people** can equally participate in decision-making in all matters that affect them?
- What **top priorities** should the new policy framework focus on?

2.3.1 What is working well?

Responses to what is working well can be grouped into 5 main themes (arranged by frequency of mentions).

- Policy, Strategies and Legislation
- Participation Structures/Consultations
- Participation methodologies
- Voice and Advocacy
- Capacity building: Research, Training and Awareness

Policies, Strategies and Legislation

National policies, strategies and legislation were named as having a positive impact on the degree to which children and young people can now participate in the decisions affecting them. The ratification of the UNCRC and UNCRPD in 2018 was mentioned frequently as significant in this regard, as was the development of the DCEDIY [National Strategy on Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-Making](#) and *The Child Participation Framework*. More specifically the Rights of the Child (Article 42a) and Better Outcomes Brighter Futures (BOBF) Outcome 5 underpinned by Article 12 of UNCRC, were listed, as was the Children in Care Act. The policy changes and clarity

around the [Child Care \(Amendment\) 2022](#) was considered by one submission as assisting CYP participate in plans and preparation for aftercare, and another noted how this amendment increased opportunities for CYP to engage with the court and the legal system. Putting the appointment of Guardian ad Litem (GAL) on a statutory footing was also regarded as a positive development. One submission expressed support for the [Family Justice Strategy \(2022\)](#) and the establishment of a specialised Family Court which was named as a key development for CYP's participation. The establishment of the new Child Poverty and Well-being Unit in the Taoiseach's Office was also identified as an important development.

It was suggested that the [Education \(Student and Parent Charter\) Bill](#) furthered children and young people's participation in decision-making. Within early years education, *Aistear* and *Síolta* were named as both promoting and recognising children as active citizens who can make choices and decisions. Within post-primary education, the ETBI's [Patrons' Framework](#) (2022) was named as facilitating participation in decision-making.

Organisations described how specific policies and strategies in their organisations facilitated greater CYP's participation in decision-making e.g. [Tusla's Child and Youth Participation Strategy](#) (and associated ring-fenced resources and training) enabled participatory practice to become embedded within the organisation.

One submission (Educate Together) drew attention to their [Blue Print](#) which calls for all second-level schools to have a policy on student participation which might include, for example, policies for students making decisions about what and how they learn and how their learning is assessed, as well as participating in school management and contributing to the appointment process for positions in the school.

Oberstown Young Detention Centre's [Participation Strategy](#) was cited as an example of how young people are involved in decision-making within the service (e.g. are involved in weekly unit meetings and monthly board of management meetings, and are involved in staff recruitment).

Participation structures and consultations

The second theme, participation structures and consultations, captures the range of structures that are currently in place, which were generally regarded to work well and support children's and young people's voices in decision-making.

Respondents referred to existing structures e.g., Comhairle na nÓg (CNN), Dáil na nÓg (DNN) Hub na nÓg, Seanad na nÓg, National Youth Assemblies, and ISSU which were described as providing positive structures for youth voice. Two organisations referenced some of the successes of the DNN National Executives e.g. the recent success of the National Executive in securing the student travel card, as well as the development of [Our Voices Our School](#) which provides teachers and schools with advice on how to implement student voice in the classroom and at whole school level.

'Dáil na nÓg and Comhairle na nÓg have proved a successful platform for children to express views, shape debate, and participate in consultations on a national level. Comhairle na nÓige throughout the country have a strong digital media presence and capture the issues that children in Ireland are most concerned about.'

(Written Submission: Organisation)

Organisations such as Foróige were recognised as providing local, regional and national avenues for participation. The participative structures provided through Youth Work Ireland (YWI), the National Youth Council of Ireland (NYCI) and youth advisory panels were also named. School initiatives such as Creative Schools, Green Schools, Active Schools and Yellow Flag were listed as positive initiatives enabling CYP's participation and voice.

Some of the submissions from organisations gave examples of specific consultations carried out by their organisation to capture the voice of CYP to develop guidelines, handbooks, curricula, resources and tools. Examples also included consultations with CYP to help shape the development of education policies (e.g., primary school curriculum, development of primary maths curriculum and the SPHE and RSE programme for post-primary schools).

One organisation referenced the greater participation of CYP in the development of government policies with the examples of *Looking at Our School* and the [Cineáltas Framework and action plan on bullying \(2023\)](#).

The importance of including the voice of CYP in the development of education policy, curriculum reform, and in research was made across the submissions. Likewise, the importance of the voice of CYP in the development of programmes such as the [Creative Youth Programme](#) was also noted. Two submissions referenced the increased awareness of youth voice in policy making, bringing new thinking and perspectives. One highlighted the recent RSE consultation as an example. A further example was the involvement of CYP in devising a residential care handbook.

The pledge of additional grants to youth organisations to provide more opportunities for the 'voices of the leaders of tomorrow to flourish' was endorsed by one organisation.

Specific structures and consultations to engage with more marginalised and seldom-heard CYP were also highlighted, including the work of NYCI with DCEDIY on [Young Voices](#), and recent efforts made by Department of Education to include seldom-heard children in consultations.

At an EU level, the [EU Youth Dialogue \(EUYD\)](#) was identified as the central participation process for young people in the EU, offering direct dialogue between decision makers and young people. CYP's participation in [Erasmus+](#) and the [Model United Nations](#) was positively noted. One organisation highlighted the participation of CYP with an intellectual disability at EU level, noting the recent delegation to Geneva, and the advocacy work of Tamara Byrne, the first young person with an intellectual disability to sit on the European Disability Forum Youth Panel, at the European Day of People with Disabilities. CYP's participation in the ['It's Your Right; The Beyond Limits Event'](#) organised by the Ombudsman for Children's Office (OCO) was also mentioned as an example of what is working well giving CYP with disabilities a forum to have their voice heard.

Two organisations described how CYP feed into and inform the direction, decision-making process and development of their organisation e.g., having a role in the Board of Managements (BOMs). One described how CYP are involved in decisions on staff appointments.

School councils, youth councils, debating societies and transition year (TY) volunteer activities were mentioned in several submissions as structures supporting CYP's participation and decision-making at school and community level.

‘These and other initiatives have contributed to a greater awareness of the importance of consultation with young people and their participation in decision-making, both among professionals, organisations, agencies and sectors who work with and on behalf of children and young people, but also among young people themselves.’ (Written Submission, Organisation)

Participation methodologies

The third theme in the responses to this question centred on participation methodologies, highlighting how the use of creative and appropriate methodologies have advanced CYP’s participation in decision-making. The adoption of **Lundy’s Model of Child Participation** within policy and local strategies was regarded as positive. The application of the Lundy Model, paying attention to feedback and accountability (and seeing change happen), was considered by some submissions to be central to the participation process. The materials/resources, developed within the DCEDIY Participation Strategy and Framework, were identified within some submissions as facilitating increased CYP’s participation in decision-making in matters that affect them.

The use of accessible processes to enable and facilitate participation for all was also described. The increased use of digital platforms during the lockdown was noted as widening participation opportunities particularly for those for whom in-person engagement is difficult. Specific methodologies and approaches, such as restorative practice and digital technology were considered by some to increase student participation in decision-making.

Youth-led approaches were also recognised as supporting CYP’s participation, as well as those led by teachers and parents. Specific resources developed by organisations were described e.g. [NYCI’s EU Youth Dialogue Youth Participation](#) and [Youth Empowerment tool](#) include resources and tools for youth workers to promote capacity building among young people.

For in-person consultations the use of **‘friendly and exciting environments’** such as the Miesian Plaza was mentioned in one of the submissions prepared by young people. The use of roundtables/mats was regarded as working well, as was having materials and information in accessible language. Taking basic safety issues into consideration in participation processes was also noted as positive.

Voice and advocacy

The fourth overarching theme, voice and advocacy, captures responses that reference both the progress in raising awareness and supporting youth voice and rights and also the importance of providing support and advocacy to children and young people to have their voice listened to.

Reference was made to specific advocacy services that support children and young people to voice their opinions in decision-making. As noted above, one submission expressed support for the publication of the *Family Justice Strategy (2022)* for placing children at the centre of the process and giving children the option to speak to the judge. The decision to put the role of GAL on a statutory footing was also welcomed.

Positive practice and processes for giving seldom-heard children a voice were described in the submissions. One outlined how CYP with an intellectual disability were part of a recent delegation to Geneva, where they were given the opportunity to advocate at both national and EU level. In their submission, Oberstown described how they offer independent advocacy to CYP to ensure their voice is heard within the organisation.

Tusla reported an increased awareness of the importance of youth voice and participation among the organisation and among adults who work in services for children. Alongside this they reported an increased willingness among CYP to participate and express their voice in the decision-making process.

Capacity building: research, training and awareness

The fifth theme, *Research, Training and Awareness*, flags the benefits of a growing knowledge base and awareness in the area. Many of the written submissions (from organisations and individuals) cited national and international research to support their messages. Research contributing to an increased understanding of children's lives (e.g., [Children's School Lives](#) study) was regarded as beneficial in advancing CYP's participation in decision-making. Research was regarded as having a positive role in the promotion of inclusive education through studies that engaged CYP with diverse needs. It was seen as a useful process when used to inform the development of policies and practice in relation to participation in general, and specifically in relation to supporting and including the voice of seldom-heard CYP e.g., the voice of children with SEN (Banks and McCoy (2016) *Special Classes in Irish Schools*), and care experienced children and young people.

Participation training and increased awareness among those working with and supporting children and young people were credited with supporting them to participate in decision-making. One submission noted that the Government's consultations with children and young people have played a role in increasing awareness of the place of youth voice.

Reference was made to the importance of the DCEDIY Participation Strategy and Framework, and Hub na nÓg's provision of materials, advice and training. Similarly, with ring-fenced funding, Tusla provided participation training to 2,695 community and voluntary staff. Likewise, professional development and support for teachers in relation to CYP's participation and decision-making was linked to training and capacity building.

One submission noted graduate teaching standards for [CÉIM](#) include recognition of the voice of the child. It was suggested that an increased awareness among school staff and leadership teams on the importance of UNCRC Article 12 has led to increased and meaningful consultation and participation.

2.3.2 What is not working well?

Five themes capture the feedback on what is **not working well**.

1. Lack of representation of all CYP's voice (and issues) – the voice of the seldom-heard;
2. Limited follow up, feedback, and influence;
3. Low awareness of rights and opportunities for voice;
4. Lack of voice in policies and legislation (seldom-heard CYP);
5. The need to meet children's and young people's basic needs.

The first four themes account for many of the responses.

Lack of representation of all CYP Voices (and issues) – the voice of the seldom-heard

This overarching theme highlights the concerns expressed that not all children and young people are represented in consultations or in decision-making, and that the voices of many specific groups are seldom-heard. The responses coded within this theme identify the groups of young people that respondents feel are not sought or heard, as well as the areas or specific issues that are not fully addressed.

Regarding representation, there was concern that engagement with CYP was ‘*patchy at best*’ and that formal participation structures (e.g., CNN) are inaccessible for many young people. Some felt that the selection and election processes used in CNN can act as a barrier, eliciting the voice of more confident, able, and majority culture children. These structures were considered less accessible for children with additional needs.

Concern was also expressed that seldom-heard children and young people are not represented in the decisions that affect them. Several submissions were concerned about the limited opportunities for children and young people with disabilities (particularly intellectual disabilities) to have their voice heard, as additional barriers they face can negatively impact on their ability to participate.⁴

Adults making decisions ‘for’ rather than ‘with’ CYP with additional needs was regarded as problematic, as was the limited availability of advocacy services for children with disabilities, and the lack of provision made for children and young people with higher communication needs and deaf children.

Children and young people with care experience were also identified as having limited agency in the decisions that affect them and little representation within the formal participation structures. Concerns included the degree to which children in care are involved in planning for their transition out of care, (and the ‘cliff edge experience’ for many as after care plans are not realised). The fact that their right to participate in their Child in Care Reviews is frequently not fully observed; and the need to place their right to be heard via independent advocacy via legislation on a statutory footing. One commented that children and young people in care are often subject to ‘*stigma, stereotyping and discrimination*’ which can also extend to their interactions with the state, and subsequently affect their participation in decisions affecting them.

A number of submissions suggested that young people with poor mental health or problems are frequently not included in the participation process, and they lack meaningful voice in mental health interventions and programmes, they are ‘*not seen to have an understanding of their own needs.*’

A couple of submissions identified barriers to participation for CYP engaging with the family court and legal system, and that structures and mechanisms in place presented difficulties in this regard.

Likewise, the voices of CYP from marginalised, minority, vulnerable and disadvantaged groups were identified as seldom-heard. Specifically identified were those from the Roma, Traveller and LGBTQ+ communities, refugees, migrants and asylum seekers and those in emergency accommodation, as well as the voices of babies and children, young people living in certain geographical areas and CYP who wish to be educated and engage with services in the Irish language. Children and young people living with adverse childhood experiences were also regarded as having less voice.

‘Youth participation on an ongoing basis shouldn’t be restricted to one small group of young people.’ (Written Submission, Organisation)

The need for participation methodologies and approaches for seldom-heard CYP

Related to the issue of representativeness, problems and issues regarding some consultation methodologies were also raised. The methods and formats used to conduct some formal consultations (e.g., in person consultations) were identified as barriers for some groups of young people. Some felt the support systems (e.g., personal assistance support) are not always in place to allow some children

⁴ One submission cited research from *Growing Up in Ireland* and *State of the Nations Report 2020* as evidence.

and young people with disability/special educational needs (SEN) to participate in such consultation processes. There was also some criticism of the information given/briefing about consultations and how this can be inaccessible for some young people:

- Not available in formats or language they can easily access/ insufficient detail to inform CYP on the nature of the consultation
- Where CYP have limited knowledge on a particular topic, not enough attention or time is given to capacity building

Two submissions highlighted the difficulty in recruiting representative groups of CYP for consultations when little advance notice is given, and that poor scheduling of consultations can lead to '*consultation fatigue*.' Another described the approaches and strategies used to harness the voice of CYP across policy and curricular development as '*fragmented and sporadic*.'

Although not directly related to participation methodologies, one submission identified university research ethics committees as a barrier to CYP voice. Whilst acknowledging the desire to safeguard people's rights, the research ethics process can deny children (particularly more vulnerable CYP e.g., those with disabilities) an opportunity for space, voice, audience and influence.

Limited follow up, feedback, and influence

The Lundy Model of Participation was endorsed by several submissions. However, it was noted that not all four elements (voice, space, influence and audience) were given equal weight. The lack of 'influence' was mentioned frequently.

'Teachers listening but not acting.' (Written Submission, Organisation)

One submission commented that the emphasis on the 'voice' component was to the 'expense' of the other three, that children and young people had limited influence, with a lack of feedback on impact or decisions made following consultations. Others talked of the lack of 'feedback loops', feedback that was 'slow' or 'non-existent', and that CYP are not always made aware of how their views influence decisions.

The impact of this lack of feedback was noted by a significant number of submissions. Many expressed the opinion that children and young people view consultations and other participation structures as 'tokenistic', that they '*do not show an end result or a follow-up*', that they have no impact, and are little more than '*tick box*' exercises. One submission expressed the view that an 'abundance' of consultations in some areas is also seen to be problematic, reducing their perceived value to a tick box exercise.

Some expressed the viewpoint that when the participation process ends at the consultation stage the opportunity to make youth friendly policy is lost. They recommend that children and young people are engaged at all stages of the process, with an emphasis on translating the messages into policy, research and legislation, and a focus on implementation.

One submission provided the example of a consultation to inform BOBF which identified four domains (Mental Health, Cyberbullying, Independence, Diversity and Individuality) where there was a lack of follow up on some of the domain actions and issues raised by CYP in consultations e.g., mental health, suicide, rural isolation, drug issues, education reform, transport and the voting age.

Some submissions provided specific examples where specific groups of children and young people experience a lack of influence e.g., children in care, where decisions made about them are 'resource-led' rather than 'needs-led' (e.g., child's wish to stay in locality restricted due to lack of foster care spaces).

Low awareness of children and young people's rights and the value of voice

It was suggested that CYP's opportunities to participate in the decisions that affect them are hampered by a lack of awareness among some adults on the value of doing so, and the benefits of seeking and listening to CYP's voice is not always understood. Submissions described this lack of awareness in the education system, particularly at primary school level where pupils are rarely asked their opinion on the day-to-day classroom practices. This was also deemed to be the case within the legal system where one contributor said there was a lack of understanding of the value of youth voice among professionals in these settings.

One submission noted that adults who do not work with CYP sometimes lack knowledge and awareness of CYP's rights. Others suggested that there can be confusion and a lack of understanding of the actual meaning of CYP's participation.

There were a few mentions of a low level of awareness of the current structures for participation, and that the consultation structures through CNN are not widely known.

Lack of voice in national policy and legislation (seldom-heard CYP)

A few references were made to government or policy level issues, and how these are not furthering the goal of CYP's participation in decision-making. Firstly, it was stated that the goal around CYP with disabilities was '*rarely mentioned explicitly in laws, policies, or programmes*;' that the Assisted Decision-making (Capacity) Act (2015) only applies to adults. One submission pointed out there is no mention of CYP's participation in the Child Care Act, 1991, and another that representation of students in BOM is not national policy.

One submission noted that while the Education Act promoted the establishment of student councils in post-primary schools, it did not detail the specifics of student participation in areas such as curriculum/subject content. Notably, it did not recommend that student councils be established in primary schools.

The need for cross-government networks to be strengthened was also identified, with one submission suggesting there is a disconnection between policy and practice with state agencies who are failing to uphold the rights of the child to participate in state agencies in decision-making.

The need to meet children's and young people's basic needs

Meeting children and young people's basic needs was stated as a priority by a few of the submissions. Concerns were expressed that CYP's voices are excluded due to social inequality and digital poverty; that the effect of hidden harm, and parental alcohol use is largely unaddressed; that the rights of CYP with disabilities (particularly an intellectual disability) are not being met with unacceptable waiting lists for assessments and therapeutic interventions. Evidence from school reports on the negative impact of housing distress on CYP's ability to participate in school life was also noted. One submission stated that until CYP's basic needs are met, it is very challenging for CYP to meaningfully participate in decision-making.

Several submissions flagged issues relevant to the lives of children and young people that are not adequately addressed.

- Digital era and lives;
- Pedagogy and content of the school curriculum.

Other concerns

Other points made in response to this question included the concern in one submission about the erosion of teachers' authority because of the emphasis on student participation in decision-making, and how student voice in some cases acts as a platform for questioning teachers' capabilities.

'This {questioning teachers' capabilities} is unacceptable as it creates suspicion and resistance and undermines any benefit of student voice.' (Written Submission, Organisation)

In the written submissions from parents, the dominant concern was the erosion of parental authority, and the tension between this and children's rights (mentioned in the context of children's rights on gender transition) and the negative impact of giving children too much responsibility while immature. One parent advised to keep the focus on 'due weight' and 'best interests of the child'.

2.2.3 What needs to change?

When responding to this question, many submissions suggested changes at a governmental 'strategic' level, as well as practical actions to support CYP to participate in decision-making. To minimise duplication 'top level' strategic actions are reported in Question 4 (government action). Many of the remaining actions have been grouped into five, sometimes overlapping, categories.

1. Nurture a culture of participation and voice in homes, schools, and communities
2. Voice of all CYP including the seldom-heard 'hidden' voices.
3. Develop more inclusive participation approaches and methodologies.
4. Meaningful voice with influence.
5. Capacity building: training, education and guidance.

'Every service that they access (e.g., from pre-school onwards) needs to routinely listen to their feelings, hopes, interests and ideas and make decisions respecting the input they receive. Managing expectations will be important in this regard. Not every thought, feeling, idea or priority of an individual child, or adult, is actionable immediately, or ever. However, regularly offering children some choice, control and agency from a young age, demonstrates respect and esteem for them, their opinions and emotions.' (Written Submission, Parent)

Nurture a culture of participation and voice in homes, schools, and communities

This theme captured suggested actions to secure the voices of children and young people across a range of settings including homes, early years settings, schools, communities, and civic institutions. Submissions suggested providing CYP with more opportunities to have a say and make a difference to their lives.

'Voice needs to be central rather than an 'add on'.

(Written Submission, Organisation)

Suggestions on ways to nurture a culture of participation included offering children and young people a greater voice in 'every day' spaces e.g., allowing students choice in day-to-day classroom practices. Other suggestions included having youth-led agendas and consulting CYP on issues important to them. One submission suggested having child advocates in all departments.

Some submissions made suggestions of actions to support CYP's voice in different settings including the home/family setting, early years settings, schools, youth work/youth services, local authorities, courts and legal settings.

In homes and families

In the submissions from parents, the importance of the voice of the parent and the importance of family was the dominant theme. One suggestion of action to support CYP participate in decision-making centred on the recognition of the importance of family and strengthening and reinforcing the voice of the parents, particularly regarding gender transition. One submission welcomed the concept of seeking children and young people's views and treating them with respect but cautioned against permitting CYP have the final say on life changing decisions.

'As a guiding principle no child or young person should be facilitated to make permanent life-changing or life-altering decisions while not legally an adult. These would include decisions having a negative impact on their health, included would be decisions around smoking, vaping, alcohol consumption etc. We know that children often think they are capable of making decisions in these areas and we as adults know that they need protection from themselves in these areas.' (Written Submission, Parent)

Voice in early years settings

A small number of submissions made suggestions of actions to support early years educators and parents to ensure views of the youngest are captured. These suggestions included following the *Diversity, Equality Inclusion Charter and Guidelines for Early Childhood Care/Education*; to promote an inclusive culture and to engage children in decision-making.

‘The perceived difficulty of involving younger children should not get in the way of making their participation real’

(Written Submission, parent)

Voice in schools

Many of the submissions focused on actions to allow for meaningful participation of pupils in schools, particularly primary school settings. The bullet points below summarise the key suggestions.

- Develop and embed mechanisms to ensure all members of the school community are supported to express their views within an open and positive environment
 - Student voice should be part of a whole school approach that values and encourages contributions of all members of the school community including teachers;
 - Raise awareness of the importance of student voice among school staff and among students (see also **Training and Education**) e.g., build on *Our Voices Our Schools* to disseminate best practice.
- Promote Assessment for Learning (AFL) and instructional leadership practices to generate a democratic safe and participative learning environment for CYP
- Meaningful participation
 - Student voice activities should be viewed as a holistic part of learning and developing, rather than simply an exercise which enables a school to comply with external requirements;
 - Allow pupils to have a voice in the core work (e.g., how they learn, what they learn etc.);
 - Avoid tokenism.
- Enhance participation structures in schools
 - Student councils in primary school/Student councils to have more influence;
 - Student representation on Board of Management;
 - Student representation in Primary Stakeholders’ Forum;
 - When inviting CYP on committees make reasonable adjustments to support their voice e.g., easy to read documents/induction etc.).
- Include CYP’s participation in school inspections/school self-evaluations
 - Consider how to consult with younger children as part of school self-evaluation, inspectorate inspections and quality framework evaluations.

‘Develop and embed a culture and practice of actively engaging every student as an active agent in their own learning.’

(Written Submission, Organisation)

One submission, whilst recognising the absolute right of the children and young people under Article 28 of the UNCRC, stressed it is important to balance student voice with the protection of the relationship between the teacher/student and the professionalism of the teacher. They cautioned that student voice must not impact on teachers/principals discharging their duties (best interests apply). This submission recommended the adoption of the NASUWT’s Eight Principles of Listening to children and young people.

Voice in youth work/youth services settings

Three of the submissions highlighted the role of the youth work sector which they felt needed to be acknowledged and supported by:

- Moving beyond one-off consultation events;
- Engaging youth workers in the process.

Local authorities

Submissions highlighted the need for children and young people to have a greater say in decision-making within local authorities (e.g., local area development, housing, school buildings, social and leisure spaces):

- CYP to have a place in local authorities;
- More involvement of CYP's voice on the provision of facilities and services for CYP.

Courts and legal settings

Suggestions of ways to improve CYP's voice in courts and legal settings included:

- Securing the voice of the child on issues such as contact time with parents;
- Ensuring opportunities for the voice of the child/young person to be heard in the court settings.
 - CYP to have direct access to court system (not dependent on social worker).
 - Ensure authorities put systems in place to capture voice and report involvement.

The need to secure the voice of all CYP including the seldom-heard 'hidden' voices

Ensuring that all children and young people have a voice was a dominant theme in the written submissions from organisations (and across all questions). As outlined above, many of the submissions identified specific groups of children and young people whose voices are often missing or 'hidden' (See Appendix 4 for detailed list of seldom-heard CYP and suggestions of ways to increase their opportunities for change).

Actions to promote the inclusion of seldom-heard CYP across different settings include:

- Schools should develop strategies to ensure that all students, not just a select few, become involved in participation structures;
- Ensure space is given for seldom-heard CYP to have their voice heard in the development of processes and services for young people;
- Strengthen capacity of professionals to foster an inclusive approach;
- Offer opportunities and resources to CYP with additional needs:
 - Ensure the adults/professionals involved have an understanding/knowledge about the CYP e.g., language they speak, communication devices and need for translator;
 - Provide all relevant information in accessible formats/languages.
- Develop and share resources for securing the voice of seldom-heard CYP;
- Engage in more outreach, especially to more marginalised communities;

Specific actions to improve opportunities for the voice of two groups of young people featured strongly in the suggestions: children and young people with disabilities/special education needs and children and young people in care.

The voice of children with disabilities

Several organisations felt it was important to seek the voice of CYP with disabilities, who want to express their views and want to be listened to. One submission felt that CYP with disabilities and, when appropriate their parents, must *'be recognised as an equal partner and not merely a recipient of services'*.

Suggestions of actions to help secure their voices included:

- Providing children and young people with disabilities and the organisations who work with them with training on consultation processes and mechanisms;
- Use assisted decision-making arrangements;
- Develop guidance and specific methodologies for consulting with children and young people with disabilities (in line with the participation framework);
- When seeking the views of CYPD:
 - Develop guidance to support CYPD to express their views in a way that meets their communication needs and abilities (beyond easy-to-read documents);
 - Accessible communication/Alternative and Augmentative Communication (AAC);
 - Develop creative approaches for older children with SEN to actively include them.

The voice of children in care and care experienced children

Similarly, several submissions made suggestions of ways to ensure the voice of the child/young person in the care setting is considered in decision-making. The suggestions included:

- Supporting CYP in care to voice their opinion on all matters relating to their care placement:
 - Have meetings after school to allow CYP attend meetings without missing school;
 - Providing support from independent advocates;
 - Staff who seek to understand CYP's needs, specific goals, and aspirations;
 - Plans for leaving care need to be discussed and reviewed regularly.
- Creating the environment for voice:
 - Ensure that essential measures (including adequate social work numbers) are in place to facilitate CYP's right to participate;
 - Allow time for the relationships and trust to build/minimise staff turnover etc.

Enhance and maximise current participation structures

Submissions made some suggestions to address some of the shortfalls of the current participation structures (outlined in Question 2).

- Widening current structures to represent all CYP;
- Have more 'open calls' to capture those not already engaged in government consultations;
- Exploring how CYP can be facilitated to inform decisions of leadership and management (e.g., in BOM);
- Provide training, guidance and support for teachers to set up student councils in primary schools;
- Introduce CNN for primary school pupils.

Some submissions made suggestions on how current processes might be improved to capture a more 'representative' voice of children and young people. These included the improvements to the planning and timing of consultations.

- Allow time to build the capacity of the CYP (particularly hard to reach) to meaningfully engage with the processes;
- Provide advance notice of forthcoming consultations;
- Take time with the recruitment of children and young people:
 - Clear communication on the nature of consultation and the expectations from CYP;
 - Ensure events are accessible to all CYP (not just those involved in groups/structures).
- Use of suitable and accessible methods to gather opinions from all CYP, without making those who need the support (e.g., SNAs) overly dependent on adults;
- Address barriers to engaging in consultations:
 - Decision-makers to go to CYP rather than asking CYP travel to them;
 - Host events outside Dublin or address transport barriers (cost associated with travel);
 - Use of online methods/digital technology;
 - Support with cost of online technology.
- Provide funding to ensure that seldom-heard CYP can be supported to attend consultations and have their voice heard (e.g., interpreters, aides, suitable transport etc.).

Develop more inclusive participation approaches and methodologies

In the same lines as actions to secure a representative voice, some of the submissions made suggestions on actions to improve the methodologies used to secure the voice of the more seldom CYP and to maximise youth voice.

- Have dedicated resources to engage CYP who are vulnerable, marginalised or seldom-heard;
- Develop participation methodologies specifically for seldom-heard children e.g., materials to suit children with disabilities, creative approaches for younger children and hard to reach CYP;
- Provide youth friendly information using plain and child-friendly language;
- Use creative, fun, innovative methods, informed/co-designed by CYP to increase participation;
- Use guidelines such as Junior Cycle Well-being Guidelines when consulting CYP in school;
- More inclusivity e.g., support with transport costs or provide transport.

Meaningful voice with influence

'All CYP have opinions on what affects them, and these opinions should be listened to, heard and enabled to influence their world.'

(Written Submission, Organisation)

As noted above, several submissions identified the need for more meaningful voice in decision-making. Some noted that it is not always possible to act on all the views and suggestions that young people put forward, but good participation practice should have a feedback process to report back what has happened to their views. Suggestions of actions within this theme included.

- Adopt all four features of Lundy's model to ensure real participation;
- Having a greater focus on influence:
 - Provide details on the timescale of decision-making, how CYP's input will be used and what feedback CYP will receive;
 - Feedback to CYP on the impact of their voice on decision-making, impacts on practice and delivery of care.
- The engagement of CYP should move beyond consultation to include design of consultations, implementation of actions, as well as monitoring and evaluation.
 - Use [Youth Check Tool](#).

Capacity building: training, education, and guidance

The need for education and training featured in many to the submissions. This theme had five subthemes: Increase general awareness of the CYP's right voice and the benefits of CYP's participation; Provide training for professionals; Educate CYP on their rights and build their capacity to express their views; Guidance and tools to support CYP's participation; and Research and evidence.

Increase general awareness of the importance of CYP voice in decision-making

- Public information campaign to raise awareness of the importance of children's voice in matters affecting them
 - Increase awareness of the state's obligations
 - Build public trust
 - Increase awareness of the positive impact of CYP's voice on decision-making on practice and delivery of services

Two submissions identified the need to raise parents' awareness of children and young people's rights to voice and their involvement in learning

- Provide information to parents on new curriculum specifications and involvement of CYP in their learning path

Training and Professional development

The importance of training and development to professionals' awareness of children's and young people's right to have their voice heard also featured strongly in the submissions.

- Increased training and professional development for decision and policy makers on CYP's engagement;
- Highlight /promote the content of guidelines which sets out models for participation;
- Provide training to government agencies:
 - Use case studies;
 - Work with ITE/CPD to raise the importance of voice and agency;
 - Provide examples of creative approaches for seldom-heard CYP.
- Provide practical supports for professionals engaging in CYP engagement and participation in decision-making;

- Continue the capacity training (as outlined in the final review of the national strategy on participation in decision-making):
 - The model of training could be enhanced to include more sustainable developments such as the addition of specialists' roles/competencies within organisations.
- Training on participation for education settings (all levels).
 - Provide training for teachers, school leaders and management on student voice and inclusion in decision-making
 - Incorporate principles of participation, together with advice on how to support the development of these skills into teacher training courses and to the work of DE and NCCA
 - Training, guidance and support for teachers to set up pupil councils in primary school
- The need for inclusion training was also identified as important to secure the voice of the seldom-heard/more hidden voices:
 - Inclusion training for professionals working with children;
 - Training for youth workers/people working in youth settings on different disabilities and ways to engage those CYP to have their voice heard.

Some submissions identified practical ways to encourage and support the delivery of training.

- Funding for the training of staff for effective leadership to champion and facilitate participation;
- Time for teachers to avail of CPD opportunities;
- Training to be delivered in schools to maximise its uptake from more school staff;
- Providing funding to schools/organisations to conduct consultations and for ongoing dialogue (in keeping with international best practice).

Education and capacity building of children and young people

In addition to providing professionals with education and training, several submissions identified the need to raise CYP's awareness of their rights and to build their capacity to express their voice on matters important to them.

- Enhance decision-making skills in the curriculum/develop voice in CSPE classes:
 - Educate CYP on how to vote, the power of their vote and the consequences of using or not using the vote;
 - CYP should be taught how to participate and have their voice heard, and to notice and question when their voice is not being heard.
- Increase CYP's awareness of their rights by having a child focused awareness campaign, designed by CYP.

Development of guidance documents/tools to support CYP's participation and voice

Submissions also called for further guidance documents.

- Guidance for policy makers/decision makers:
 - Guidance for policy and decision makers on the difference between consultation and participation.
- Guidance for schools:
 - Update the Student Council publication. *'The current publication does not reflect nor support the voice of students in this generation'*;
 - Provide guidance to schools and education settings to ensure all publications and policy development reference the need for CYP engagement;

- Provide guidance for schools on how to ensure student councils represent diversity of school community, and seldom-heard (e.g., nomination for other school committees, diversity committee, active school committee, green school committee);
- Provide guidance for student councils on using new and alternative spaces to capture CYP's voice;
- Guidance for schools on facilitating the seldom-heard in decision-making e.g., for CYP with English as a second language, ensure there is transparent communication
- Provide schools with support materials and practical examples of the Lundy Model in action
- Framework/Guidance document for schools and FET settings on supporting CYP's participation, possibly developed by [Oide](#) (to develop the guidance, training and support materials)
 - Including curriculum specifications and the aim of facilitating children's participation in decision-making regarding the focus and direction of their own learning through such specifications would be welcomed.

Research and evidence

The final sub-theme captures the importance of evidence to underpin practice. Three submissions suggested that the new policy framework needs to reflect best practice and emerging practices in youth participation.

- Conduct research to identify evidence-based examples of good practice from other countries;
- Identify examples from research on ways to include the voice of seldom-heard CYP (e.g., non-verbal children);
- Develop indicators of good practice;
- Reflect on and review participation models e.g., the Lundy Model.

The importance of securing a robust evidence base of participation practice was also raised in the suggested actions.

- Research /measure/audit participatory practice across a YP's journey in an organisation e.g. use [Youth Check Tool](#);
- There is a need to demonstrate, account for, and evidence participatory practice in all levels and sections in an organisation/agency.

To demonstrate the benefits of children and young people's voices in decision-making, one organisation suggested reporting on how voice is secured in government funded projects to increase the visibility of high-level consultations to *'model and embed the notion of children's participation at community and everyday level, helping to create 'demand' for opportunities to participate'*.

Another considered how the children's and young people's views might be communicated and suggested the sharing of children's and young people's views to policy makers.

- Create an online bank of CYP's quotes on a range of topics for policy and decision-makers.

Other suggestions

Other suggestions of changes/actions required to support CYP's participation in decision-making included:

- Meet the wider needs of CYP (e.g., education, housing, mental health services):
 - Provide greater support for mental health services in local areas to enable students to be happy and healthy to participate in local initiatives.
- Support the rights/role of parents in the decision-making process;
 - Recognise that adults have a greater understanding of most issues than children.

- Support Irish speakers
 - All services affecting children need to be available in Irish so children can participate and make decisions through Irish or language of their choice;
 - CYP must have access to opportunities for participation and decision-making through the medium of Irish;
 - When interacting with the legal system, documents be made available in Irish, judges to interact in Irish.

2.2.4 How can the government remove barriers so that all CYP can equally participate in decision-making in all matters that affect them?

Suggestions on ways the government might remove barriers to children and young people participating in decision-making are captured in five themes.

1. Voice in legislation and policy
2. Implementation of the new Government Policy Framework on the Participation of CYP in Decision-making
 - Leadership from government
 - Implement structures/resources to secure the seldom-heard voices
 - Enhance and maximise the potential of participation structures
 - Funding and resources
3. Meaningful voice and influence
4. Research and evidence
5. Other
 - Ensure children's and young people's basic rights are met.

Legislation and policy

Suggestions of actions within this theme focused on progressing the implementation of legislation or policy relevant to CYP's voices and voices of more seldom-heard young people.

- Incorporate Art. 12 of the UNCRC into domestic law;
- Progress the implementation of provisions in the Childcare Act (amendment) Act 2022 with regard to participation of children in care proceedings;
- Progress the implementation of the Student and Parent Charter Bill;
- Implement the outstanding actions from BOBF in relation to consultation on education;
- Fully implement all actions from Ryan Report (2009);
- Fully enact the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act (2004) :
 - Any review of EPSEN Act should include the issue of student voice and be informed by charters and guidelines from 2004.
- The DCEDIY to give consideration to the Assisted Decision-making (Capacity) ACT (for YP aged 18+) which is due to commence in 2023;
- Referendum on lowering voting age:
 - Give young people the vote at 16 to allow them to choose the people who will represent them/Electoral Commission to conduct participative research on extending voting rights to 16- and 17-year-olds

Implementation of new Government Policy Framework for the Participation of CYP in Decision-making

Several submissions made suggestions for the implementation of the new framework.

- The government to consider widening the age range for the policy to include older young people aged 18-24 years:
 - Examine policies in other EU member states to see if the age limits should be brought in line with the EU structured dialogue (up to 30 years).
- Greater cross-government cooperation around implementation of the policy framework and national youth strategy. More accountability structures, points of contacts and inter-departmental working groups;
- EU Youth Dialogue can play a pivotal role at national and EU level and must be reflected in the new policy framework:
 - For the new BOBF and participation strategy, consider having the model of Children and Young People's Policy Consortium (which was as part of the implementation structure of BOBF which provided YP to engage with policy makers via EU Youth Dialogue (EU structured dialogue) process).
- Engage with and learn from the EU Children's Participation Platform as an approach to raise awareness among children, policymakers and professionals and to share learning:
 - Learn from EU partners and their approaches to facilitating participation in decision-making (e.g., UNICEF's Rights Respecting Schools and Rights Respecting Cities).
- Include input from Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (DFHERIS) on the Participation Framework to take account of the need for YP to be involved in decision-making past their 18th birthday.
- Government departments to implement **impact assessments or youth checks** to ensure CYP are involved from start to finish in development of policy/legislations and there are no unintended consequences for CYP.

Leadership from Government

- Integrate participation at all layers of decision-making including research, policy and legislation
- Increasing the visibility of the framework and principles of children's participation, this would benefit by cross-government implementation.
 - Establish a cross-party working group to examine compliance with the UNCRC across all settings;
 - All government departments and state bodies to adopt the Lundy Model of CYP's participation in their operations;
 - Need to introduce structures to ensure all government department's approach policy development with a youth lens (not just the DCEDIY);
 - Raise public service employee's awareness of the duty under the UNCRC to ensure CYP's participation in decision-making.
- Coordination across Government to vindicate rights of CYP especially for those whom state is acting in loco parentis;
- Share examples of CYP's participation in the DPER'S Quality Customer Service documents;
- Dept. of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (DHLGH) and Electoral Commission to increase investment in supporting YP to vote.

Implement structures/resources to secure the seldom-heard voices

'Ask children what they feel they should be consulted on' (Written Submission, Organisation)

Many of the suggested actions within this theme centred on how the Government can help remove barriers so that children and young people with disabilities and/or CYP in care can participate in decision-making.

Focus on children and young people with disabilities

- Greater emphasis on the rights of CYP with disabilities in laws, policies and programmes;
- Secure the view of CYP with disabilities when developing the new framework e.g., similar to the youth disability policy within BOBF or the stand-alone LGBTI+ strategy:
 - The adoption of such a policy framework would ensure that youth initiatives such as CNN, NYCI, DNN, Foróige etc. are inclusive and the voices of CYP with disabilities are heard in a meaningful way;
 - Establish a youth council of young disabled people to identify the priorities and needs of CYPD and work on how consultations and discussions can be organised in an accessible way.
- Provide advocacy for CYP with disabilities (CYPD):
 - The state to consider commissioning an independent advocacy service for CYP with disabilities to ensure that they can be represented nationwide and supported to participate in decision-making (similar to EPIC for Children in Care);
 - As CYP who use alternative and augmentative communication methods or ways of communicating are often excluded from participation, advocacy is required to ensure they are accessing their right to AAC and a functioning communication system.⁵
- The DCEDIY to give particular attention to ensuring that CYPD participate on an equitable basis to others in the decision-making process
 - Government to understand the specific needs of children with higher support needs e.g., children who are non-speaking
 - The DCEDIY to liaise with the Decision Support Service and consider developing guidance on how to use supported decision-making to enable those who need it to participate in the process
 - Establish reasonable accommodations for the inclusion of CYP with disabilities in policy consultations, government efforts and initiatives (Consistent and resourced)
- Develop the work of the Ombudsman for Children's Office to ensure CYP with disabilities are engaged in decisions that affect them
- Remove barriers to consultation⁶
 - Use Universal Design Processes;
 - Ensure the adults involved in consultation have received Disability Equality Training from a rights-based perspective;
 - Host consultations in accessible venues and formats;
 - Use online platforms;
 - Ensure Irish sign language is available when required.

⁵ See *Inclusion Ireland Report* on access to AAC as a human right.

⁶ *Participation Matters Guidelines*

Focus on children and Young People in Care

Suggestions of ways of improving the voice of children and young people in care included:

- Promote more collaborative cross-departmental working to provide a holistic wraparound support to ensure CYP in care thrive and achieve
- Align state budgeting and legislation to address needs of CYP in care
- The DCEDIY needs to review participation of CYP in care in care planning and reviews
 - The DCEDIY to provide guidance on how to resource and facilitate CYP in care in care planning and reviews
 - Aftercare planning needs to be happening on a continuum from the point a child comes into care
- The new Child Poverty and Well-being Unit should have a specific focus on children who are in care of the state

Enhance and maximise the potential of participation structures

Suggestions within this theme capture the need to enhance and promote structures within the community and within the school settings.

- The government to review existing participation structures and how to link them for greater impact
- Offer structures to engage with CYP beyond the current DCEDIY Participation Unit structures
- Continued funding for CNN and similar structures
 - Have more flexibility within CNN to secure greater inclusivity and representation
 - Widen consultation net to other NGOs and semi-state agencies to bring YP into decision-making
 - Implement a CNN for primary school pupils
 - Use experience and connections of NGOs to facilitate CYP's participation in CNN especially those supporting seldom-heard children.
- Build capacities of CYPD and their organisations.
- Increase awareness of participation structures and opportunities to inform policy.
 - Increase children/YP's awareness of democratic structures and processes at school, at local and national levels
 - Information campaign in schools, communities, care settings/social work depts.
 - Raise awareness of participation in decision-making through existing strength of statutory and voluntary structures
 - Reach out to organisation (visit organisations rather than expect them come to government)
 - Advertise public consultations to children and young people
- Ensure all information is accessible – *'findable on gov.ie'* – in plain language.
 - Provide age appropriate and objective information
 - Publish policies and frameworks in accessible language

School structures

- Inclusive policies in schools to provide a sense of belonging/Equality based education
- Roll out school initiatives such as Nurture that respond to CYP at most risk to develop knowledge and skills to fully participate in all aspects of society;
- The Department of Education to secure support for all stakeholders for the involvement of students as associate BOM members at post primary school level.

Digital and hybrid participation opportunities

- More investment in digital engagement campaigns;
- Establish, under the aegis of the DCEDIY, an expert cross-sector inter-agency group on digital participation;
- Develop a national online participation platform for children;
- Combine in-person and online structures;
- For CYP with disabilities: Accessible online resources (see NDA Participation Matters and NDA's [Lockdowns Unlocked Innovation Reports](#)).

Funding and Resources

- Provide funding to ensure effective implementation of the new framework.
- Increased resources at local and regional levels to facilitate engagement of CYP.
- Funding for organisations to continue to develop and commit to CYP's participation.
- More funding for schools and youth organisations who want sustainable CYP's voice activities such as ESD to 2030.

Meaningful Participation with Voice, Audience and Influence

While the CNN and the National Youth Assemblies were viewed as a step in the right direction on youth empowerment and youth voice, several submissions cautioned against tokenism. Suggestions for ways the government might provide meaningful participation included:

- Offer young people direct engagement with policy makers
- Conduct meaningful engagement this includes involving young people directly at every step of decision-making
 - Secure CYP's voice when drafting of policies (especially on those which affect CYP e.g., education)
 - Offer methods of feeding back the outcomes of CYP's shared views/recommendations
 - Politicians to be more accessible to CYP.

'That 'listening' to young people must not be considered as meaningful engagement. The experience of many young people, when conferences and consultations that don't show an end result or a follow up to the young person's participation, ultimately leads to tokenism.' (Written Submission)

Research and Evidence

- Build an evidence base on CYP's participation.
 - Demonstrate the difference made by CYP's participation in decision-making. Evaluate and monitor participation practice
 - Evaluate mechanisms against Lundy's model
- Implement a 'youth check' similar to regulatory environmental or health impact assessments to ensure policy is youth friendly and CYP are involved at all stages of policy/legislation development

Government can remove barriers to meaningful participation through the use of Children's Rights Impact Assessments (CRIA). Consideration should be given to ensuring their use becomes mandatory across all government funded services. (Written Submission)

Other suggestions

The submissions from the parents (2 individual submissions/19 written responses), whilst acknowledging the importance of giving CYP the opportunity to voice their opinions, called for a greater focus on the family and placing an emphasis on parents' final say on decision-making (not the state).

Ensure children's and young people's basic rights and needs are met

- Support parents who have children with special needs;
- Implement early intervention and prevention;
- Equal access for all to services and supports;
- Counselling services in special schools and primary schools.

2.2.5 What are the top priorities for the new policy framework?

The suggested priorities echoed respondents' responses to Questions 3 and 4. To minimise duplication the messages from this question have been combined with the findings from Survey Question 7 "**Are there any new areas that a Policy Framework for children and young people's participation in decision-making should focus on?**" and are presented in the next section.

3. Findings from the online surveys

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3.1 Overview of DCEDIY questionnaire

The DCEDIY survey (see Appendix 1) asked eight questions to capture respondents' views on ways to support children and young people have a voice in decision-making in four settings: in communities, in education, in health and social services, and in the courts and legal sector.

The survey also asked and sought respondents' views on possible ways to secure under-represented children and young people. Respondents were also asked for suggestions of new areas for the policy framework. The questionnaire ended with a short question to capture respondents' awareness of current participation structures.

3.2 Response to the surveys

3.2.1 Response to the DCEDIY survey

The DCEDIY online questionnaire was completed by 146 respondents (Professionals working with CYP/Professionals n=68, Young people n=29, Parents n=24, NGO n=6, Academic n=4, Concerned Adults n=5, CNN member n=2).

Professional working with CYP n=68	Policy maker n=5 National (3)/ Local (2)	Young person n=29 Age 18-24 (11)/ Under 18 (18)	Other n=44
CNN member (n=2)	NGO/Organisation (n=6)		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parent (24) • Adult/concerned citizen (5) • Academic (4)

3.2.2 Response to the National Parents Council Survey

As noted in the previous chapter, to inform their written submission, the National Parent Council (Primary) issued two online surveys to their membership which were promoted on the social media networks. This survey asked similar but more focused questions to capture parents and CYP's satisfaction with how children are supported to be part of conversations and decisions about education (see Appendix 2).

3.3 Survey findings

The DCEDIY survey used closed questions to capture respondents' level of satisfaction of CYP's voice across the four settings. These questions used a sliding scale of 0 to 10, where 0 represented 'very unsatisfied' and 10 represented 'very satisfied' (see Table 1).

Table 1: Satisfaction with support for children and young people to participate in decision-making in local communities, education, health and social services, courts and legal system (Base N=146)

How satisfied are you with how CYP are supported to participate in decision-making in:	Very unsatisfied n (%)	Unsatisfied n (%)	Neutral n (%)	Satisfied n (%)	Very satisfied n (%)	Average Score (base)	Not answered n (%)
Local communities (n=126)	17 (13.5%)	35 (27.7%)	38 (30.1%)	13 (10.3%)	23 (18.2%)	4.8	20 (13.7%)
Education (n=126)	22 (17.4%)	41 (32.5%)	29 (23%)	6 (4.8%)	28 (22.2%)	4.5	20 (13.7%)
In health and social services (n=110)	29 (26.3%)	37 (33.6%)	19 (15.1%)	2 (1.5%)	23 (18.2%)	4.0	36 (24.6%)
Courts and legal system (n=99)	21 (21.2%)	31 (31.3%)	20 (15.8%)	5 (5.0%)	20 (20.2%)	4.35	49 (33.6%)

3.3.1 CYP's voice in local communities

Question 1a: How satisfied are you with how children and young people are supported to participate in decision-making in local communities?

Satisfaction with CYP's voice in local communities

The question on satisfaction with the support offered to CYP to participate in decision-making in local communities was answered by 126 respondents (see Table 1). The average score on the scale question was 4.8. When examining the categorised responses to the question, 14% of respondents did not answer this question, and 30% were neither satisfied nor unsatisfied. Two fifths (41.4%) were unhappy with the level of CYP's voice in local communities (very unsatisfied (13.7%) or unsatisfied (27.7%)). Over a quarter indicated that they were satisfied (10.3%) or very satisfied (18.2%) with the support offered to children and young people in local communities.

Question 1b: Please identify what changes can be made to how children and young people participate in decision-making in local communities

Suggestions of ways to support CYP have a voice in local communities

In the follow-up question, respondents were asked to suggest changes that might be made to support children and young people have a voice in local communities. It is important to note that some parents and young people used this opportunity to describe CYP's lack of influence on local level decision-making.

'I felt like I had no voice before I turned 18 and there should be more things brought into the communities that hasn't been brought up before such as more play areas for younger children and to find something more suitable for teenagers.

(Survey, Young Person)

'I have 3 children and I don't think they have ever been asked their opinion on any development in our local community' (Survey, Parent)

'I am a member of local committees myself and there are no young people involved in them or in the decision-making process. The most inclusive local community group is the tidy towns, but they do not have young people participating in decision-making'.

(Survey, Parent and Professional working with CYP)

However, other respondents provided examples of CYP's opportunities to participate in decision-making in local communities e.g., CNN and HNN. However, similar to the written submissions, some respondents questioned the representativeness of these structures and CNN participants' opportunities to feed directly into local decision-making.

'Comhairle was supposed to be a Shadow Youth Council, which enabled young people to organise consultations on important plans and strategies which were being developed by the Council, so that young people's views could be properly organised and fed into these plans'. (Survey, Local Policy Maker)

'We have some structures in place in some organizations but this really needs to be embedded in towns villages, cities at ground level, Hub na nÓg does not really represent children and young people on the fringes of society. Sports organizations, youth clubs, all local government agencies including the Gardaí must be encouraged to collaborate'. (Survey, Individual working in Government Organisation)

Nonetheless, most responses to this question centred on actions to improve or maximise CYP's voice in local communities. These are captured within five themes.

- Voice in local authorities
- Voice in local community groups/youth services/sporting organisations
- Voice via parents/home
- Capacity building: education, training, and guidance
- Meaningful voice

'Speak to children in schools and youth groups to seek opinions on what infrastructure they would like to see and use this when planning' (Survey: Parent)

Voice in local authorities

Survey respondents' suggestions on ways local authorities might secure the views of CYP and let them have a greater influence on local decision-making included:

- Local authorities to report on their engagement with CYP
- Local authorities (LA)/councils to establish participation structures e.g., youth councils/'active youth groups'⁷ to secure CYP's views on a full range of topics and issues not just the arts and libraries
- Dedicated participation avenues within SPCs and LCDCs/Leader programmes/Peace Plus Action Plans/decisions
- Involvement of CYP in county development planning
- Adopt interagency working to consult with young people in different settings e.g., early years settings, primary schools, secondary schools, alternative school settings, youth diversion projects, youth centres and community organisations
 - Host monthly meetings/annual events
 - Local authority representatives going into schools to listen to CYP and to communicate the local authority plans and vision

Voice in local community groups/youth organisations/ sporting organisations

Other suggestions included reaching out to community groups/youth services and sporting organisations.

- Involve CYP in local community groups e.g., residents' associations, local community associations, tidy towns etc.
- Have structures that community groups can use to include CYP's voice e.g., involve volunteer-led community groups to facilitate local consultations
- Better investment and promotion of community-based youth work to build CYP's skills and confidence to participate and to offer more opportunities for youth voice

⁷ One respondent provided the example of active older age group <https://www.corkcoco.ie/en/news/older-peoples-council-launches-drive-for-members-in-county-cork>

Voice via parents/care givers

Similar to the written submissions, several respondents (who identified as parents or concerned citizens), acknowledged the importance of seeking CYP's views e.g., on leisure centres/community facilities etc. Some respondents felt that parents should have the final say on decision-making and expressed reservations on CYP's involvement in decision-making.

Capacity Building: Education, training, and guidance

Training for professionals

Echoing the written submissions, survey respondents highlighted the need for capacity building among professionals working with CYP.

- Training for community organisations (e.g., Family Resource Centre staff, local authority staff, youth service providers, volunteers etc.)
- Training to include methods of securing CYP's voice, and how to secure seldom-heard (especially CYP with SEN)
- Use Public Participation Networks (PPNs) to educate and engage community groups
- Funding to support the training and development of such organisations

'Young people are not consulted in local matters, there are very few people trained in how to elicit youth voice in an appropriate way. Youth groups, voluntary groups, community organisations all need to have training in how to include the voice of young people in the decision-making process and this needs to be modelled by statutory bodies, the training needs to be free and community services need to be made aware of how and why this will improve their services and capacity building capabilities'

(Survey: Professional working with CYP)

'It is vitally important that all young people and children are enabled to participate and facilitators are trained and knowledgeable in the process to ensure a good process'

Raise awareness of benefits and opportunities for local voice

A small number highlighted the need to raise awareness of the importance of voice among adults, particularly among parents.

- Raise parents'/communities' awareness of the benefits of CYP's voice and opportunities e.g., via Information evenings/newsletters/workshops for parents/guardians would also be necessary to get children involved in local communities

Educate CYP on their rights and raise awareness of local opportunities to express their views

Echoing the messages from the written submissions, survey respondents also highlighted the need to (a) increase CYP's awareness of their rights to voice and (b) raise their awareness of opportunities in local communities to have this voice heard.

- Involvement of schools to promote CYP's voice in decision-making from an early age e.g., raise awareness of their rights and share opportunities to have this voice heard at local levels
- Local councils actively promoting opportunities for youth voice
 - A national media/social campaign focused on the legal basis, benefits and possibilities of including children and young people in decision-making in local communities
 - Coordinated locally throughout the year to promote CYP's voice
 - Involve youth organisations (e.g., Foróige/GAA) to actively promote opportunities
 - Door to door to involve **all ages** in local decision-making
 - Via social media/Involve YouTube Influencers
 - Share best practice from across the country in this regard (rural and urban exemplars)
 - Apps/online platforms that share what is happening locally/videos that show what's involved.

Meaningful Participation

Across all the four questions (communities, education, health and social services, the courts and legal systems), respondents highlighted the need to have meaningful participation and voice.

- Avoid tokenism
 - Offer genuine opportunities to share their views and experiences with decision makers
- Information and feedback loops
 - Feedback mechanisms built in so that children and young people know the outcomes of their contributions (in youth friendly ways)
 - Proposed changes to local communities should be communicated to children and young adults in school or clubs to both inform and get their feedback.

Ensuring strong feedback loops, what are we doing with the information they give us and where is it used. All consultations should occur at times when young people are off school or college, so evenings or weekends.

While young people have a voice, they need to see their voice being put into action, not just hear them but following through on what they are saying.

In addition to having meaningful audience and influence, several respondents suggested actions to enhance the current participative approaches and structures to enhance voice.

- Create safe spaces for CYP to share their views and opinions
 - Respectful but fun approaches/Peer facilitators/Plain English/Age appropriate (e.g., involve children via play, drawing etc.)
 - Content and topics relevant to CYP
- Expand opportunities for voice beyond the permanent structures
- Funding to support CYP's involvement in local decision-making
- Mandatory inclusive consultations as part of government funding
- Develop inclusion policies for community council/fora to ensure CYP's voice is sought

Other suggestions

A small number of respondents to the survey expressed the viewpoint that CYP already have a voice in decision-making and that no additional actions are required.

Others identified specific groups of children and young people whose voices are not represented (see Question 5 and 6 for further detail), and/or identified issues or topics which needed to be addressed (see Appendix 5 for list).

3.3.2 CYP's voice in education

Question 2a. How satisfied are you with how children and young people are supported to participate in decision-making in education?

DCEDIY Survey: Satisfaction with CYP's voice in education

This question on satisfaction with CYP's voice in the education system was answered by 126 respondents (see Table 1). The average score on the scale was 4.5. When examining the categorised responses to the question, 14% of respondents did not answer this question, and 23% were neither satisfied nor unsatisfied. Among the respondents who answered, half were not satisfied with the level of voice in education (unsatisfied (17.4%) or very unsatisfied (32.5%)). Just over a quarter indicated that they were happy with how children and young people are supported to participate in decision-making in education (satisfied (4.8%) or very satisfied (22.2%)).

NPC Survey: Satisfaction with how CYP are supported to be part of conversations and decisions in education.

NPC Survey: Satisfaction with how CYP are supported to be part of conversations and decisions in education.

As described above, the National Parent Council survey asked similar but more focused questions to capture parents and CYP's views on their satisfaction with how children are supported to be part of conversations and decisions about education (see Box 2).

Box 2: NPC Survey Questions

Parents: How satisfied are you with how your child is supported to be part of conversations and decisions about education (Base: 598)

Children and Young People: Do you get a chance to share your thoughts and ideas, and to be part of the decisions about education? *(Like sharing your thoughts and ideas with the student council in your school, making decisions about what subjects you might like to learn about in post-primary school or even sharing your thoughts on what all children learn in schools in Ireland.)* (Base: 166)

Table 2: Summary of Parents and CYP's satisfaction with CYP's support to be part of conversations and decisions about education (NPC Survey)

	Very dissatisfied n (%)	Not satisfied n (%)	Neutral n (%)	Satisfied n (%)	Very satisfied n (%)	Base
Parents	13 (2%)	130 (22%)	209 (35%)	166(28%)	18 (13%)	N=598

	No n (%)	Not really n (%)	I'm not sure n (%)	Kind of (%)	Yes n (%)	Base
Children	22(13%)	44(27%)	21(13%)	48(29%)	31(19%)	N=166

In response to this question, a third (35%) of parents and just over 1 in 10 (13%) children were unsure and gave a neutral response to this question. Two-fifths (41%) of parents were happy with how they or their child are supported to be part of decision-making in education. Nearly half (48%) of children were happy with the support to be part of the conversations and decisions in education.

Notably, two fifths of children (40%) and quarter (24%) of parents were dissatisfied with CYP's voice in education.

When parents were asked about how their child is supported to participate in decision-making, the most common responses were:

- 57% said that their child is invited to share their thoughts, ideas and opinions at home
- 39% said that their child's teacher invites them to share their thoughts, ideas and opinions
- 30% said that there is a student council in their child's school where their child can share their thoughts, ideas and opinions
- 16% said their child shares their ideas via survey
- 4% said their child shares their ideas/views via focus groups

Similar to the parents' survey:

- 55% of CYP said that their family asks for their thoughts and ideas on education
- 43% said that their teacher invites them to share their thoughts, ideas and opinions
- 22% identified the student council as somewhere they can share their thoughts, ideas and opinions
- 5% said that people from outside organisations come to their school and talk to students about what they would like to learn about, and what they think the government should be working on, and other things about education.

Regarding the settings/environment in which their views were sought.

- 22% of CYP said they are in a child-friendly space when people ask them to take part in conversations and decisions about education
- 14% said they are in accessible spaces when these conversations are happening
- 13% reported they are in diverse groups with people who all come from different places, look different or have different needs when their thoughts and opinions are sought

The NPC survey asked parents and CYP about possible barriers to CYP sharing their views in education.

Parents views:

- 31% of parents did not think there is anything that they believe makes it difficult for their child to be part of the conversations or decisions about education
- 28% said that their child is not asked to take part in conversations or decisions about education
- 22% described their child as too embarrassed to speak up, share their thoughts or be part of decisions
- 10% of parents identified other reasons
 - English not the child's first language
 - Shy children
 - Children with additional needs not properly catered for, consulted or included in the decision-making process
 - Children do not believe their voices matter
 - Parents are not aware of consultation opportunities
 - Children too young (junior infants)
 - Communication difficulties (e.g., ASD, /speech delay/ dyslexia)
 - Not part of school ethos

CYP's responses:

- 36% said no one asks them to share their views;
- 30% said they were too embarrassed to speak up or share their views;
- 12% identified not having different options to share views (e.g., through art, stories, photography etc.);
- 8% described problems in access (e.g., not being able to get into the rooms or spaces to share their views (4%) or not being able to travel to events where CYP share their views (4%))
- 20% didn't know.

Suggestions of changes to improve CYP's voice in education

'Student voice needs to be harnessed from day one and consistently worked on to encourage its vociferous nature throughout school years.'

The DCEDIY survey asked for suggestions of ways to provide CYP with more opportunities to become involved in decision-making in education. Responses centred on:

- A school culture supportive of CYP's voice
- Voice via school structures (e.g., student council, BOMs, etc.)
 - Give student councils more voice and influence
 - More input into education policy making
- Structures outside the schools (e.g., CNN, national consultations, etc.)
- Voice via parents/teachers
- Capacity building: Training and education
- Meaningful voice
- Voice on specific issues

A school culture supportive of CYP voice

'There must or should be a constitution written up by all children/young people in the school, this should be reviewed by the young people each school year. The constitution must be given real status in terms of children's rights, ideally the Department would endorse this. This will embed a sense of civic responsibility and encourage the young people to become fully active citizens in 'society'.

A small number of respondents' suggestions centred on creating a school culture that is supportive of youth voice. Actions to encourage such a culture included:

- The approach of the school (e.g., Educate Together) or the school leadership style (e.g., Senior management/BOM)
- The school constitution and school charters
 - The Parent and Student Charter to embed the role of student voice in education
- Use of group agreements/Youth work approach
- Meitheal type approach

Voice via school structures

'Young people seen as partners in their education and not just recipients.'

This theme captured improving the current structures available to CYP to participate in decision-making in education. Student councils (in post-primary schools) were described as an opportunity for CYP to have their voices heard. However, several respondents identified some of the limitations of this participative structure. One suggested they need more 'clout' as they were often tokenistic with limited influence. Others felt they were not representative of all students (particularly seldom-heard CYP and those who disagreed with authority).

Anecdotally, young people feel excluded from decision-making - particularly within the school setting. Student Councils need to be enabled and decision makers trained to properly engage with Student Councils

Suggestions for improvements to current participative structures in schools included:

- Making school councils mandatory across education and provide schools with updated guidance on how to involve pupils in decision-making
- Introduction of school councils in primary school to embed a culture of voice and participation
- Changes to the school council system
 - Ensure they are consulted as part of school decision-making process
 - Having clear pathways for listening and acting on the views of the student council/More influence
 - More input into education policy making (DE)
 - Representation from all year groups/overlapping members from one year to the next

‘More input from youth councils, rather than a tick the box exercise, principals need to have a clear pathway for listening and acting on the views of these representative bodies.’The Student Council structure, while useful, is too frequently tokenistic. Schools need clearer guidance in relation to the involvement of students in decision-making processes at an early stage.’

‘Children’s councils/student councils being a valid and significant part of every primary school’s management structure and embedding the habit of consultation and reference at a young age, so that at Secondary school level, it is building on an existing culture of behaviour from the young people and from the adults involved.’

- More democratic decision-making in the schools
 - Each student gets a vote
- Representation on BOM /decision-making boards
 - Members or observers on BOM to see how students’ views are implemented
 - Students to be provided with training and supported in this process

‘In fairness some schools are excellent in their youth engagement. Each school must have a youth council; they must have two young people on the board of management (one supports the other). They must be given equal status with the adults, in fact they should/ could be given extra voting rights on the board’.

‘Almost all decisions from an educational point of view are made without consultation to YP. YP are very much disempowered by the Education System. Again, they should be represented on school boards and given a voice and should be consulted on all educational decisions that impact on their lives and their well-being.’

One respondent supported greater voice in the drafting of school policies but cautioned against involving the student body in matters relating to industrial relations.

- More opportunity to feed into national level decision-making.
-

‘At the macro level, how many boards of management meet with the students to listen to their concerns? Does the Dept. of Education take the views of students, past or present, into consideration when reviewing the curriculum?’

Voice via structures outside the school

A smaller number of respondents highlighted structures outside the school system that allowed opportunities for students' voices and opinions feed into policy making. These included:

- Voice in national policy making (e.g., NCCA)
 - ISSU representation on NCCA
 - Youth services
 - Initiatives such as Our Voices Our Schools
-

This is improving with student representation on the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment and the initiative on Student Voice. The Irish Second Level Students Union (ISSU) is a welcome stakeholder.

Voice via parents/teachers

Similar to the previous question, a proportion of parents questioned children and young people's ability to make lasting decisions and expressed the viewpoint that parents/carers should be the decision makers.

'Therefore, the participation of children in decisions relating to education should be as part of conversations that take place within individual family homes according to the individual families' religious/ moral/ ethical values etc.'

'The best way to ensure that children's views, opinions and feelings are understood, respected and incorporated in the area of education is to provide for a good relationship between the school and the home - teachers listening and talking to children and parents, parents listening and talking to children and parents and children listening and talking to teachers - everyone involved working together. This is the way it has always worked well. Any policies etc. should be aimed at ensuring that this continues and is improved, i.e., by making it possible for parents to spend more time with their children rather than both working all hours to provide.'

Capacity building: Training and education

Similar to the written submissions and echoing survey participants' responses to the question on voice in communities, suggested actions to increase CYP's voice in decision-making in education included training to ensure staff and CYP are fully informed on the CYP's rights in this regard. Suggestions included:

- Training for school staff including senior management.
- Education, training and capacity building for students.

'Schools should be made to adopt The Lundy Model and this should be taught in the Junior well-being cycle.'

‘The most important change required is in the quality of supports necessary to assist the young person in learning to form and express their ideas/opinions, to listen to others, to consider other perspectives, to negotiate, to have compassion and empathy, to represent different students, to collaborate with other students and teachers, to lead change, to experience having their voice heard. These supports will need to be in place from early education if they are to be embedded successfully. It is not sufficient or fair to expect the teenager to “be heard” if they do not have the necessary skills to do so.’

Suggestions on ways to improve school staff’s knowledge and skills included the inclusion of a module on children’s rights in teacher training (for primary and secondary school teachers). Organisations such as National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA), National Council for Special Education (NCSE) and Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST) were identified as important in this regard.

‘The primary and post primary-sector need to take a much more focused approach to participation and voice. Educators, teachers and parents also need to be educated around these issues.’

Other suggestions included continuing professional education (CPE) and continuing professional development (CPD).

‘Harnessing the support of the Qualifications’ Advisory Board in relation to early childhood education and the Teaching Council in relation to primary and post-primary education is essential in this regard. The role of the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA), National Council for Special Education (NCSE) and Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST) are also critical in this regard.’

‘An understanding of participation needs to form part of initial teacher education. There are also very few CPD opportunities for principals and teachers during their career to get to grips with this. There needs to be a better understanding of participation with purpose and the benefits of adapting curriculum to the actual lives of young people. There has definitely been progress, but more needs to be achieved through education of both adults and children of their rights regarding full participation, not just student voice.’

At an implementation level, some respondents suggested ways of embedding CYP’s voice within the school e.g., making it compulsory for each school to have at least one teacher trained in child and youth participation, and having space within the curriculum for teachers to educate themselves on CYP’s participation in decision-making. One respondent suggested creating an online training programme. Others suggested having CYP’s rights as part of the whole school inspection (WSE).

‘It is not always understood why and how children and young people can participate in decision-making in education. Creating a professional learning (PL) programme, that is freely available online to educators from early years, primary and post-primary settings would ultimately contribute to children’s and young people’s increased participation in decision-making in education. The PL programme should focus on both the ‘why’ and ‘how’ of participation through providing a clear policy and research context for participation and providing tools/strategies for educators to employ. This PL programme should include strategies that ensure all children’s participation is supported and that disability is not viewed as a barrier to participation.’

‘It needs to be seen as a quality indicator and should be inspected on during whole school inspection processes’.

Similar to the written submissions, survey respondents also identified the need to provide opportunities to increase parents’ awareness of children’s rights to voice. Some highlighted the need to support parents, particularly parents of children with disabilities, to be part of the decision-making process in education.

Increase CYP's awareness of opportunities for voice

Similarly, some respondents highlighted the importance of raising students' awareness of their rights and alerting them to opportunities to voice their opinions.

'For something that is so central in their development, the education system continuously fails to make young people aware of how they may influence it. While bodies like the ISSU exist, it's presence isn't known to the majority of students. Students may speak up against something they disagree with but are far too often met with an answer such as "that's the way the system is." Instead of these excuses, teachers should be encouraged to help amplify the voices of their students and let them know how they can work to accomplish change.'

Meaningful voice

As described in the previous question, the importance of meaningful voice and influence also featured strongly in responses to this question.

- Avoid tokenism
- Give more weight to the views of CYP (particularly in primary schools)
- Inform CYP what happens to their views

'Appears to be more avenues where young people can put forward their views but need more tangible evidence as to how these views are being used and what their actual level of influence is. '

'Young people can gain greatly if the policy makers and other stakeholders recognise and seek to hear their voices in relation to matters which affect them. '

Related to the importance of meaningful voice, respondents described recent examples of student voice in education e.g., the Department of Education's recent consultation to inform the bullying strategy and their ongoing engagement on RSE in schools. Some described actions at subject level to allow students to have more autonomy e.g., how learning methods can be adapted to suit the student in English, and through respectful debate in class.

Respondents identified the need to use participative and youth friendly approaches to secure voice on an ongoing basis. Their suggestions included:

- Age appropriate, inclusive, respectful, and fun.
 - Co-designed with CYP
 - Easy to read/understand
 - Trained facilitators
 - Different data collection methods
 - Allowing time to complete survey/for critical thinking/debate

Voice on specific issues

Curriculum Reform

‘Delivery of education requires review. It is failing children as it has done for years.’

Several respondents highlighted the need to secure students’ voice on the curriculum, assessment and approaches to learning. Respondents describe an absence of opportunities for CYP to feed into the design and implementation of the curriculum.

‘Young people are disempowered in school, the junior and leaving cert curriculums are very narrow and traditional, outdated learning models. If youth voice were really appreciated in schools and conducted properly it would transform our education system.’

‘Young people have no say in decision-making in the education system. The education system is failing so many young people. Young people need more autonomy and I believe there has to be major reform in education.’

- Offer students more autonomy in school
- Seek CYP’s views on what they would like to learn and how they would like to learn it

Subject choice and school choice

A couple of respondents identified the lack of choice of subjects in some schools which place CYP at a disadvantage. Another described the curriculum as not fulfilling future employers’ needs from the workforce.

There is a huge gap between students and the adults that set the subject curriculum. The Department of Education should discuss the intended approaches with a group of students so that they can understand its impact on students all across Ireland. Not all schools are able to provide all the subjects, which puts those students at a disadvantage in terms of options.

The curriculum is not meeting the expectations of employers, and our young people are not afforded the opportunity to affect change at third level.

The importance of voice in school choice was also raised.

I think that there is an opportunity for young people progressing to secondary level and their parents should have all the options presented to them. The attendance of a young person at an open night can often be what determines how a young person decides what school they would like to attend but they are not providing young people with the options open to them.'

Other issues

Some respondents identified the need to involve CYP in policies on racism, bullying and LGBTI+ issues. Other issues included careers advice and the ways of identifying the early indicators of early school leaving.

Voice in everyday decisions.

One respondent described the importance of everyday conversations to involve students in decision-making.

NPC Survey: How CYP might be involved in conversations and decisions in education.

The NPC survey also explored how CYP might be involved in conversations and decision in education.

CYP's views:

- 46% said it would help if the teacher would ask their opinion
- 35% would welcome surveys
- 34% would like outsiders to come to the school to ask their opinions, what they would like to learn about, what they think the Government should be working on
- 31% would like to be invited to events to share their views

- 31% would like if their family would ask for their thoughts and ideas
- 23% would like to share their views with the student council
- 10% would like more people who look like them in conversations about things that are important to them
- 8% said something else would help:
 - Their views to be taken seriously
 - Option of private input into decision-making e.g., suggestion box
- Parents' views:
 - 63% suggested more opportunities for CYP to be part of conversations in schools
 - 45% suggested more opportunities via focus groups
 - 44% would like their child to be consulted using child-friendly methods
 - 40% identified more opportunities via different methods (e.g., art, stories etc.)
 - 38% via surveys on topics important to them
 - 32% in spaces and groups that are diverse
 - 26% consulted in accessible spaces
- Other suggestions included:
 - Their views get taken seriously/follow-up
 - Younger children to have a place on student council/SC in primary school/Give SC more influence (e.g., direct access to DE).
 - Build it into homework to get the conversation opened in school and develop skills
 - Using social media
- Only 6% of parents stated that they did not think anything needed to change

In an open question, 287 parents provided further ideas of support to ensure all children are supported to participate in the decision-making process. Examples of their suggestions included:

- Safe spaces so they can voice their views
- Open discussions/forums in school
- Teachers, BOM, DE to listen to CYP and take their opinions on board
- Communication/language support to explain the importance of voice.
 - Teachers dedicated to those issues who understand
 - Child-friendly conversations/fun
 - Capacity building in class
 - 1:1 conversations
- Respect/equality/inclusion
- Trained staff/facilitators
- Targeted consultations to capture all CYP/representation of all groups
- Time to discuss, explain, and show outcomes
- School and home support
- Nationwide student council

3.3.3 CYP's Voice in health and social services

Question 3a: Satisfaction with CYP voice in Health and Social Services

This question was answered by 110 (75%) of respondents. The average score on the scale was 4.0, which was the lowest score for this set of questions. A quarter (26/146 24.6%) of respondents did not answer this question. Over half (59.9%) indicated they were very unsatisfied (26.2%) or unsatisfied (33.6%) with CYP's voice in health and social services.

Question 3b: What changes can be made to how CYP participate in decision-making in health and social services.

This question was answered by 109/165 (74%) of respondents. Among the 109 respondents who went on to answer the question, a further 15 stated they did not know or were unaware of ways of supporting voice in decision-making in health and social services. Among the remaining responses to this question four broad themes emerged which reflected the previous answers.

- General support for CYP's voice in decision-making in health and social services
- Voice via advocacy
- Voice via parents/carers
- Capacity building: Training and education
- Meaningful voice
- Specific support needs in health and social care

My son was chronically ill for the past 15 years and regularly in and out of hospital - A&E, paediatric units in XX and XX Hospital - multiple surgeries and procedures. He has never been asked for feedback on his experiences. He has a lot of constructive feedback he could provide and that would greatly enhance the system.

(Survey Parent)

I am not aware of mechanisms for young people to be involved in decision-making in this area and as such structures for the engagement with young people must be implemented.

(Survey; Professional National Association)

Some noted that child and youth participation has improved in social services but not in health services. One suggested that the two services should be dealt with separately due to the different structures.

General support for CYP's voice in health and social services.

Several respondents expressed support for CYP's voice in health and social services but did not suggest how this might be achieved.

One respondent provided suggestions of ways voice might be embedded in the services:

- Funding and service level agreements that are tied to children's rights
- Designated staff and implementation plan
 - Staffed by personnel with training in children's rights (including agency staff)
- Health services need to involve primary care and GP in CYP's participation

'Children have little opportunity in health. Social services are far ahead of health, at the same time all funding must be tied to children's rights, service level agreements must have this written into contracts; staff in those agencies must provide a copy of child and youth participation training which endorses the UNCRC. Health needs to have designated staff and an implementation plan, they need to create participation and partnership officers' roles, health also needs GP's and primary care services to work in collaboration on this topic.'

The need for investment and restructuring of the health service (particularly mental health) was raised in seven responses. Some felt that under-resourced services make real participation difficult.

'Under resourced organisations and lack of staffing mean real participation is very difficult. More funding and better paid staff are instrumental.'

'Very little access to services as it is, they cannot participate if there are none.'

Voice via advocacy

The specific needs of children in care were raised in four of the responses. Suggestions on ways to improve their voice included implementing the GAL system, offering CYP access to direct work in relation to the court system and offering CYP the opportunity to meet with the judge.

'Proper provision under legislation which ensures a child's voice can be heard through legal representation, guardian ad litem or being heard directly by the judge where the child is of an age and maturity to be heard directly in both public and private matters involving health and social services.'

Voice via parents/carers

Reflecting some parents' responses to the previous questions, several parents expressed the viewpoint that children and young people should not have the final say in decisions in health and social services. Some of the parents were supportive of their involvement in the discussions but felt the last word should be with the parents. Some parents expressed concerns about CYP making life changing decisions such as changing gender.

'An adolescent brain is not fully developed and is very concerned with the here and now. That's why we adults have a duty of care to protect our children and teenagers. I'm very concerned by any proposals to reduce the legal age at which children can access cross sex hormones, perhaps without their parents' consent.'

Capacity building: Training and education

Similar to the previous responses, the importance of training and development of staff was raised.

- Focus on 'why' and 'how' and provide policy and research evidence

'Creating a professional learning (PL) programme that is freely available online.... The PL programme should focus on both the 'why' and 'how' of participation through providing a clear policy and research context for participation and providing tools/ strategies for health and social services' personnel to employ.'

One respondent felt that clinicians and healthcare professionals need training and guidance on supporting CYP's participation in decision-making in health services.

'I think that there is a lot more awareness among clinicians and healthcare staff that children should be encouraged and supported to participate in healthcare services. But many struggle to know how to include children and they still have doubts about children's capacity to participate. There is a lack of tools to guide healthcare staff in the many ways they can support children's participation.'

Meaningful voice

Again, the importance of avoiding tokenism and allowing CYP with opportunities for meaningful voice was raised by some respondents (mostly professionals working with CYP). Suggestions of ways to increase this including adopting more participative approaches.

‘The young person should be central to all decisions that affect them, during all consultations the young person’s opinion is heard in a meaningful way.’

3.3.4 CYP’s voice in the courts and legal systems

Question 4a: Satisfaction with CYP voice in courts and legal systems

This question was answered by 99/146 (68%) of respondents. The average score on the scale was 4.35. Among those who responded to the question, half (52.5%) indicated that they were very unsatisfied (21.2%) or unsatisfied (31.3%) with CYP’s voice in the courts and legal systems. A quarter (25.2%) indicated they were satisfied (5%) or very satisfied (20%) with how children and young people are supported to participate in decision-making in these settings.

Question 4b: What changes can be made to how children and young people participate in decision-making in local communities?

This question was answered by 92/146 (63%) of respondents. Among these 92 respondents, a further 20 indicated they had little knowledge or experience in this area, resulting in 72 (49.3%) of responses to this question.

A small number of respondents acknowledged that there had been positive developments in how children and young people’s voices were heard in the court system. However, it was noted that not all of the legal settings allow for CYP’s voice and opportunities for voice are not always implemented in practice.

‘With the Child Care Act 2022 we welcome the fact that the views of the child are sought and considered in proceedings’.

‘The system is there for the children to be listened to but it is not used. Judges don’t listen to the children. Implement the system there is and it’s fine.’

‘I am not aware of any cases where the courts or legal system asked young people about their needs during separation or divorce hearings. I am aware of many cases of young people in care who are given the minimum information about their rights, or are not refused their rights but are not told what their rights are. This amounts to them not having the same rights as young people not in care.’

The responses to this question were captured in five themes:

- General support for youth voice
- Voice via Advocacy
- Family courts
- Meaningful voice
- Voice via parents/carers

General support for CYP voice in courts and legal systems

Several respondents expressed a general support for youth voice in the courts and legal systems. Some made specific suggestions for voice in these settings e.g., ask CYP for their views on the court environment, more voice in joint policing committees (JPC), voice in youth justice via garda liaison officer etc.

‘Full participation by young people in the joint policing committees would be the starting point. Every one of the sectors mentioned has a participatory tool for adults so it is just a matter of widening this scope to include young people in an appropriate manner.’

Some called for greater investment in the legal systems to support voice e.g., garda youth diversion projects, youth support etc.

‘The voice of the child in the court in particular where the child is in care, the voice of the child and their participation in decision-making is noted in social worker report. This can sometimes be lost in reports when the voice of the parents who are in court (child is not) is heard in person.’

The specific needs of children and young people in the care system in relation to voice was also raised in a couple of responses. One respondent highlighted the need to secure the voice of younger children (age 0 to 6 years) in the legal system.

A couple of respondents noted the need to have the court setting to be more child-friendly.

‘Child-friendly Courts where the physical environment is conducive to participation.’

Voice via advocacy

The importance of implementing advocacy services for CYP in the courts and legal system was raised in a number of responses. Most referenced the GAL system for children and young people in care.

‘A lot of what I think in relation to the health and social services relate to the courts and legal system regarding children’s involvement in decision-making: 1. A properly functioning independent guardian ad litem system. 2. Ability for appointment of a guardian ad litem in public and private law cases. 3. Provision for the Judge to hear the child depending on age and maturity. Already in place which aids this are: dedicated children’s courts, dispensing with formal requirements, training for legal professionals dealing with children.’

Some felt advocacy and support should be mandatory, and the GAL and social work system could be strengthened to allow for meaningful voice for all CYP in the court setting. Another called for more funding for personnel to accompany CYP to court services e.g. for domestic violence, sexual assault cases.

‘Strengthening of GAL system, increased number of GALs, courts to appoint GAL for children and young people involved in all court proceedings including all family law cases’

‘There are cases where GALs are appointed but this is not representative of the voice of the child, it can be about therapeutic interventions and what they may see as best for the child. Social workers can similarly do this. The child’s/yp’s participation in decision-making is only as good as the person representing them.’

‘I am not aware of any cases where the courts or legal system asked young people about their needs during separation or divorce hearings. I am aware of many cases of young people in care who are given the minimum information about their rights, or are not refused their rights but are not told what their rights are.’

Family courts

A small number of respondents identified the need for specialised family courts and to provide training for professionals working in the family court setting. A couple of respondents made specific reference to the importance of voice in family separation and family courts.

'Let them have a voice during judicial separation cases for example.'

'Vital need for specialised Family Courts. With the Child Care Act 2022 we welcome the fact that the views of the child are sought and considered in proceedings.'

Not all were sure that children and young people should be involved in family courts.

'Children should not be involved in courts including family courts. This damages children as they cannot please both'

Meaningful voice

Similar to the previous questions, the importance of having a meaningful voice was raised in the responses to this question. One respondent felt it was important to engage CYP in the system in a meaningful way.

'In order to be able to understand the law and the general legal system of our country, YP need to be able to question/challenge/ understand/and propose alternative measures that have a greater impact on them within society. They should not be just expected to accept certain justice decisions without first having an understanding of why certain decisions are made, or being able to have a voice into how changes can be made for the positive.'

A small number of respondents identified the need to have more engagement with CYP.

'Not at all, unless they are part of a court order and guardian ad litem is assigned, which would suggest chronic circumstances. A forum that would represent young people and followed through could address this - like a public consultation committee for young people.'

‘Appoint a council of young people who have some power of the decisions made’.

‘It comes back to making sure their voices are heard’.

Related to the importance of influence, a small number noted the importance of having different ways of securing the CYP voice e.g., research with the child, or allowing the child to complete a booklet in advance which would be shared with the judge.

‘Would it be possible if young people/children could complete a booklet/form capturing their views that could be given in evidence to a judge and not just have their views within a social worker report. The judge would be hearing directly from the child/yp through this.’

‘Conduct a survey to tease out what programmes and interventions young people would like to see applied in the courts and legal system, especially the Youth Justice System.’

Capacity building: Training, education, and guidance

Within these themes respondents called for training and development of professionals working within the courts and legal systems. The need to educate CYP on the legal system to ensure CYP are fully informed and prepared for the court settings was also raised to support voice in the court and legal systems. Actions suggested providing information in plain language in written and video format.

‘Children being given advance information as to what “participation” means in the decision-making and legal system. This information needs to be age appropriate and children should have a space where they can ask questions and check out their information. Children and young people often don’t differentiate the different roles that Social worker, Solicitor, Guardian Ad Litem and Judge may have in the decision-making process so again, information and an understanding of the process may help the participation.’

'More ads on platforms they engage with and info about where to go for legal rights info. Children's Alliance. My feeling is that there is a lot being done but kids could be brought on trips to court anyway so as to demystify things and hear from legal people in school. These legal people need to be good communicators and not bamboozle people.'

Voice via parents/carers

Similar to the previous questions, a section of respondents expressed the general opposition to the voice of the CYP until they are over 18 years. Within the context of the courts and the legal system a small number expressed the viewpoint that the CYP should not be involved in court settings (e.g., family courts)

'As far as I'm aware a child's opinion is taken into account in regards to custody and access over a certain age. For other decisions they need parental advice.'

'Unless it's to do with the juvenile system I think people under 18 do not need to be concerned with it until they are adults'

A small number felt that it was important to allow for the voice of the CYP to be heard, but parental input was equally important and the final decisions should rest with adults.

'Children need to be supported in order to have their voices heard in the courts and legal systems. Consequences of legal advice can often be overlooked and therefore children do need parental support as parents are often their child's best advocate. '

'I find that on the whole the courts/legal system are interested in the viewpoints of the child but they have to get a balance between rights of parents, best interests of the child and legislation available to them.'

3.3.5 The voices of under-represented children and young people

NPC Survey

The NPC survey asked parents/CYP if there are some children who are under-represented in participating in decisions that affect them. 67% of parents felt this was the case, 26% didn't know, and only 8% felt this was not the case. 306 parents and 86 children expanded on who they think those groups of children are (see Table 3). The most common answers were: Shy or quiet children, children with SEN/disability, children who are disadvantaged, minority ethnicity/EAL children, and children who are not at school.

Table 3: NPC survey respondent's suggestions of under-represented children and young people

Parents' suggestions of under-represented children. (306 responses)	CYP's suggestions of under-represented children. (86 responses)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shy or quiet children. • Children with special needs, or neuro-diverse children. • Children whose first language is not English. • Minority groups, including migrants and Travellers. • Children who live in poverty or are homeless. • Most children. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shy children/less confident children. • Younger children. • Children whose parents aren't Irish. • Children with disabilities with additional needs, or neurodiverse children • CYP who are not in school. • CYP who are bullied. • Less privileged children.

The DCEDIY survey respondents were also asked if there were any children or young people who are under-represented in participating in decision-making, and if so, what actions would make it easier for these groups to be involve. The respondents to the DCEDIY survey identified similar groups of children and young people to the NPC survey. Appendix 3 summarises the DCEDIY responses the two questions. Notably, when answering this question, several respondents identified the need for action to secure the voices of all children and young people. Their suggested actions to address these needs reflect the themes outlined in their responses to the previous questions.

Table 4: DCEDIY survey respondents' suggestions of under-represented children and young people

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All children and Young People • Early years children • Primary school children • Quiet/shy children • CYP living in rural isolated areas • Children with poor mental health • Children with learning difficulties/SEN/ neurodiversity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children with disabilities • Children who are ill/hospital (long term) • Marginalised/disengaged children/Children from disadvantaged backgrounds. • Migrant CYP/Refugees/CYP in direct provision/ Roma/Travellers • CYP in care
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4. Priorities for the new policy framework

This section combines suggestions from the written submissions with the survey responses. Taken together, suggestions for the priorities of the new Policy Framework are grouped within 6 themes.

1. Legislation and policy
2. Implementation of the new Policy Framework on the Participation of CYP in Decision-Making
3. Meaningful voice and influence
4. Inclusive voice
5. Capacity building: Education, Training, and Guidance
6. Other

4.1 Legislation and policy

Within this theme respondent identified the need of actions at a legislative and policy level.

- The new framework should:
 - Include an unambiguous recognition that the right to be heard is a procedural right and upholding this right is integral to the implementation of all children’s rights
 - Place a clear and unambiguous emphasis on participation as a means of progressing fulfilment of a broader range of children’s rights. (In addition to the UNCRC, Ireland has obligations under a range of other international human rights instruments, including the ICCPR, ICESCR, CEDAW, CERD and CRPD. These obligations, as they apply to the participation and inclusion of children also need to be considered)
 - Have regard to the State’s obligations to both children and adults under the other core human rights instruments
- The government to engage with Decision Support Services with regard to the commencement of the Assisted Decision-making (Capacity) Act

4.2 Implementation of the new policy framework

This theme captured actions and priorities for the Implementation of the Participation of CYP in Decision-Making. This theme has two subthemes:

- Leadership from government departments
- Enhancement of participation structures and opportunities

Leadership from Government departments

- Mainstream children’s participation within decision-making
 - Locate CYP’s participation in and across state bodies in the context of UNCRC and other international obligations
 - Embed participation firmly within the responsibility of all public bodies. Implement the participation framework and Lundy Model in all institutions and by all policy makers, service providers at every stage of decision-making
- Cross-government and interagency collaboration to ensure coordinated delivery of services for CYP
 - Multilateral engagement across government bodies to consider lessons, developments and innovation around CYP’s participation
 - Stronger co-ordination across government departments and agencies to increase buy in from stakeholders

- Identify priorities and actions that consider and specify the tangible benefits for CYP
- Development of a meaningful implementation plan developed in collaboration with relevant stakeholders
 - Establish a coordination structure for the implementation of the new framework comprised of stakeholders from the public, NGOs and academic sector
 - Evaluate the impact of participation on services, policy and legislation concerning children's rights
 - Increased funding, support and resources for this work underpinned by leadership and expertise of DCEDIY. Identify and ensure adequate funding for initiatives identified in the new framework

Enhancement of participation structures

'I would look at children's daily lives: what do they do, where and with whom. Based on this information you can create an overview on where participation processes take place and where not yet, or not enough' (Survey respondent)

'Less formal structure than the ones that already exist. A structure that is focused on using play or creative ways to engage children and young people. A participation method that is not just a mirror of an adult structure, maybe more flexible. Perhaps engaging through technologies?' (Survey respondent)

- Ensure the structures and systems are in place to support voice and participation.
 - Children's Forums, Youth Advisory Panels or Self advocacy groups
 - Promote student councils in all education settings
 - More representatives within existing structures (e.g., CNN)
- Strengthen efforts to ensure that participation opportunities are inclusive and offered without discrimination
 - Cultivate a sense of safety for young people so they can participate in decision-making
 - Participation methodologies e.g., easy to access, inclusive, attractive to YP, relevant and timely
 - Develop tools to capture views and opinions from birth to 6 years
- Digital participation:
 - Progress the creation of digital participation projects and a national digital participation platform - The use of digital platforms can open opportunities for engagement to children whom participation in in-person mechanisms may be difficult
 - In progressing the use of digital participation platforms, the new framework should have due regard for and support measures to address the digital divide that exists among children
- Strengthen participation opportunities in local communities and authorities

‘We must emphasise local participation as a distinct policy area and promote this as much as possible’ (Survey respondent)

4.3 Meaningful voice and influence

The written submissions and the survey identified the need for inclusive voice in both national and local decision-making.

‘The Policy Framework should reference all stages of children and young people and create the expectation that children and young people’s participation in decision-making is an expectation across all stages’ (Survey respondent)

- Focus on voice and influence in all spheres of children and young people’s lives (home, community, leisure, public services, policy and legislation)
- Work to broaden societal engagement with CYP’s participation beyond the sectors typically identified (e.g., children’s services, health, justice and education)
 - Specific focus in local area planning/local government
 - Greater support to communities, local authorities and councils
 - Include CYP in decision-making – through collaboration with Public Participation Networks (and Dept. of Community and Rural Development) and link with CNN
- Meaningful participation (involve CYP in ‘big’ and ‘small’ decisions)
- Develop mechanisms to report on participation to CYP
 - Close the feedback loop
 - Develop a model to show CYP’s transition from consultation to implementation
 - Demonstrate to CYP that their participation is meaningful, positive and impactful
- Resources: Further resources and funding are required

‘I think great strides have been made in terms of Space, Voice and Audience but greater emphasis needs to be placed on ensuring Influence by young people. (Survey respondent)

‘Recognition that supports and investment are needed to ensure youth participation can be meaningful and happen’.

4.4 Inclusive voice

Respondents to the written submission and surveys identified the need for the framework to include a focus on specific groups of children and young people (see Question 5 and 6 and Appendix 3 for further detail). The potential breadth of the focus on seldom-heard/under-represented children and young people is captured in the quote below.

‘The Policy Framework should capture the diversity of children’s lives and reference the range of groups of children and young people to include children and young people with disabilities/ additional needs; children who are seeking sanctuary in Ireland from war/famine/conflict; younger children and babies; vulnerable children (at risk or living with domestic abuse; poverty; mental health issues); children and young people with experience of the criminal justice system and children in areas of socio-economic disadvantage.’ (Survey respondent)

Suggestions of ways to provide opportunities for seldom-heard CYP to have their voice heard included creating more inclusive structures as well as developing methodologies and approaches to secure different voices.

- Actively include all CYP ensuring their voices are heard and acted upon
- Involve CYP (including seldom-heard CYP) in the development of the new Participation Framework
- Have an explicit focus on tangible measures to make participation opportunities accessible to children experiencing inequalities, exclusion, and disadvantage (to reflect broader remit of DCEDIY)
- Enhance participation of seldom-heard children in decision-making
 - Build their capacity to participate in decision-making
 - Offer opportunity and appropriate resources for seldom-heard students in education (esp. CYPD/SEN and EAL students)
 - Provide guidance for schools and centres on facilitating seldom-heard children’s participation in decision-making
- Promote the development and testing of inclusive methodologies for engaging **CYP with disabilities in the participation process**
 - Review current provision to identify gaps in CYP’s participation in national policy development and monitoring processes (particularly for CYPD)⁸
 - Strengthen and support an enabling environment for CYPD (via the funding of DPOs⁹) and create child/youth-led DPOs to facilitate the voice of CYPD
 - Establish advocacy services for CYP with disabilities

⁸ The National Disability Inclusion Strategy 2017-2021 engages with disabled people, DPOs and other organisations in monitoring the implementation of the strategy via [the Disability Stakeholder Group](#). DCEDIY also established a [Disability Participation and Consultation Network](#). Develop similar structures for CYP with disabilities.

⁹ Some DPOs have youth groups e.g., Independent Living Movement Ireland’s Youth Collective and AsIAM’s Youth Ambassadors.

- Use Universal Design approach
- Where appropriate have separate engagement with children with disabilities depending on the context of the consultation e.g., making reasonable accommodations
- Have mechanisms for the inclusion of CYPD in decisions about education, health and well-being, legislation and research. Consider developing guidance on how to use supported decision-making to enable those who need it engage in policy making and decision-making processes
- Government strategy on access to AAC and assistive technology
- Create more platforms and mechanisms in organisations that work with or on behalf of young people in the justice system and embed these as the norm.

4.5 Capacity building: education, training, and guidance

This was a theme that crossed all three consultations, highlighting the need to prioritise ongoing training and development of personnel working with children and young people. This theme has 5 subthemes:

- Training and education (Professionals)
- Education/awareness raising (Children and Young people)
- Wider society
- Development of guidance/guidelines
- Research and Evidence

Training and education (Professionals)

‘In my opinion having trained practitioners/experts that have experience and the know how in listening to children and working with young people is a key area that should be focused on. Having dedicated staff and times with education systems to facilitate children and young people to participate in decision-making is another key area of focus.’ (Survey respondent)

- Resource HNN to train and support public bodies in children’s rights and participation
 - Implement a programme for civil servants to (a) raise awareness of the importance of CYP’s participation as a right and an obligation, (b) the State’s obligation to include voice of CYP with disabilities, and (c) ways of engaging CYPD.
- Facilitate professional development for teachers and adults working with CYP
- Include modules on CYP voice in FE and HE courses
- Train/upskill staff working with CYP to engage creatively and safely
 - Training for youth workers/people working in youth settings on ways to engage CYPD to have their voice heard
- Funding and resources for training and capacity building of school staff and education partners.

Education/awareness raising (Children and Young people)

Capacity building of children and young people was also identified as a priority in both the written submissions and both surveys, with calls to ensure CYP are fully informed of their right to voice as well as opportunities available to them to express this voice.

- Inform CYP on their rights to voice and to have their views listened to
 - Provide child-friendly easily accessible material for CYP on their right to be heard, the new framework, and opportunities for participation
 - Government to use social media/online platforms to share government information relevant to CYP in an accessible, youth friendly and inclusive way (advised by CYP e.g., CNN), and including opportunities for youth voice
 - Include children's right to voice and participation in school-based curriculum at primary and post-primary levels

'Critical thinking, public speaking, respectfully and confidently sharing opinions, how to take action on issues, learning about local government and national structures to allow young people to understand the process' (Survey respondent)

Promote a cultural change to address resistance to children's rights (Wider society)

A small number of the survey respondents and written submissions called for action to ensure that parents and the wider public are informed of the benefits of children's and young people's voices in decision-making.

'Parent education. Informed parents can help ensure participation is in place across all services for their and other children.'
(Survey respondent)

- Identify and resource actions aimed at effecting attitudinal and cultural change
 - Ensure adults (including parents) are aware of CYP's rights to participation and voice
 - Provide guidance and support to parents and guardians on nurturing decision-making in the home
- Within the context of increasing parents' awareness of the benefits of children's and young people's voice, in responding to this question, some parents expressed their opposition to the voice of CYP in the absence of parental input, while a small number used this opportunity to express their strong objection to 'transgenderism' and 'transgender ideology'.

Guidance and Guidelines

Within the theme of capacity building, several of the written submissions identified the development of guidance/guidelines as a priority.

- Develop guidance for policy makers at national/local levels, service managers, educational practitioners and those working in the courts
 - Review and update the *Practical Guide to including seldom-heard CYP in decision-making 2015*.
- Develop a code of ethical guidance for participation practice

Research and Evidence

Some of the written submissions stressed the need to build an evidence base for children's rights and participatory practice. This including developing evaluation and monitoring frameworks, examining the quality and effectiveness of participatory practice, as well as using children's rights assessments (CRIAs).

- Build the evidence base
 - Develop robust monitoring procedures and evaluation metrics that capture participation activity and impacts
 - Identification of quality and effectiveness of participatory practice (e.g., nature of participation, profile of participants, and impact of participation)
 - Collect as a matter of course and good practice, data on the initiatives identified in the framework, including the number of initiatives/structures/projects, the numbers and characteristics of the children involved, the funding provided, and the issues addressed
 - Integrate reporting on participatory practice by all agencies in receipt of Gov. funding – e.g., pilot/evaluate a child's rights impact assessment with participation initiatives
- Promote the voice of CYP and families in research e.g., via PPI Ignite.

'A clear rationale for children and young people's participation should be articulated in the Policy Framework based on both legal requirements and research-related literature so that the 'why' of involving children and young people in decision-making is clearly underpinning the Policy Framework.' (Survey Respondent).

Linked to the need for evaluation and monitoring, some of the written submissions called for celebrating and sharing examples of CYP's participation.

- Celebrate CYP's participation in a national scheme/initiative, highlighting the impact it can have for CYP
 - Build on examples of EU best practice
 - Continue to share and showcase best practice

4.6 Other priorities

Other priorities included meeting children and young people's basic needs.

- A fairer society for people with disabilities with access to the same opportunities as their peers, and support for parents with children with SEN
- Listen to and involve CYP on the issues important to them e.g., equality and inclusivity, mental health, cyberbullying, independence and diversity. LGBTQI rights, and education reform
- Education emerged as one of the dominant policy areas, followed by health (particularly mental health), online safety and recreation/leisure. Other responses included equality and inclusion, disability, housing, legal systems, and transport.

Table 5: Summary of overarching messages and subthemes

✓✓ dominant message in response ✓ mentioned in response

Overarching theme	Subthemes	Written submissions	DCEDIY Survey	NPC Survey
Cross Government Action	Policy and legislation (See Appendix 3 for specific actions)	✓✓	✓	
	Leadership from government: Cross-government commitment to CYP's rights and voice	✓✓		
	Implementation plans/funding	✓✓	✓	
	Gov. funding linked to evidence of CYP's participation/CYP's participation requirement of Gov. funding.	✓	✓✓	
Capacity Building	Create a culture supportive of CYP's voice	✓✓	✓✓	
	Educate CYP on rights and voice	✓✓	✓✓	
	Alert CYP on opportunities to have a voice on decision-making	✓✓	✓✓	
	Training for professionals working in community organisations/youth services/sporting organisations	✓✓	✓✓	
	Training for public servants on state obligations and ways to secure CYP's voice	✓✓	✓	
	Training for early years, teachers/school personnel (part of teacher training and CPD).	✓✓	✓✓	
	Training for clinicians and health care providers		✓	
	Training for court officials and personnel working in youth justice	✓	✓✓	
	Develop and share participation approaches and methodologies	✓✓	✓	
	Share evidence of benefits of participative practice/examples of approaches (Evidence)	✓✓	✓	

Overarching theme	Subthemes	Written submissions	DCEDIY Survey	NPC Survey
Community	Structures for CYP's voice in local authorities	✓✓	✓✓	
	Interagency working at local level			
	Voice via structures outside school	✓✓	✓✓	
	CYP voice in local community groups/sporting organisations	✓✓	✓	
	CYP via local youth councils/CNN	✓✓	✓	
	Via schools	✓	✓✓	✓✓
	Via parents/carers	✓✓	✓✓	
Education	CYP's voice in education in curriculum design/how education is delivered	✓	✓✓	
	CYP's voice via teacher			✓✓
	CYP's voice in school councils	✓	✓✓	✓✓
	CYP's voice via surveys/focus groups			✓✓
	CYP's voice in BOM	✓	✓✓	✓
Health and social services	Voice of CYP on quality of healthcare services	✓	✓✓	
	Young people in care/care leavers	✓✓	✓✓	
	Training of clinicians and health care providers		✓	
Justice	Courts	✓✓	✓✓	
	YP in detention	✓	✓✓	
Online	Online platforms (opportunities for voice, training, sharing examples, approaches/voice)	✓✓	✓✓	
	Share CYP's views on different issues on online platform for policy makers	✓		
Voice via home/carers	Role of family /families	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓
Meaningful voice and influence	Participative approaches and structures to secure voice (CYP youth friendly/inclusive/creative)	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓
	Inclusive structures (e.g., CNN, student councils)	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓
	Views are taken on board Feedback on what has happened to views/opinions	✓✓	✓✓	✓
Inclusive voice Seldom-heard CYP	Expand opportunities to participate beyond formal structures	✓✓	✓✓	
	Voice of less represented groups (Appendix 3 for details)	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓
	Tools to secure the voice of different CYP including young children and seldom-heard CYP	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓
Research and evidence	Evaluate and monitor initiatives/develop guidance and guidelines	✓✓	✓	
Other	Meeting CYP's basic needs/rights	✓	✓	✓

Appendices

The background features a dark teal upper section. Below this, a light blue shape tapers from the left edge towards the right. The bottom portion of the page is a solid tan color, which appears to be the base of the light blue shape.

Appendix 1: Copy of Online Questionnaire

Public Consultation on the next Government Policy Framework for the Participation of Children and Young People in Decision-making

Option 2: Survey

The survey will take approximately 5-10 minutes. Please only answer the questions relevant to you. Note: EU Survey retains your personal data for the time necessary to fulfil the terms of the survey. For more information, please see the EU Survey privacy statement. However, anonymised submissions to this consultation may be released in accordance with Freedom of Information legislation and/or the EU Directives governing Access to Information on the Environment.

Question 1. How satisfied are you with how children and young people are supported to participate in decision-making in local communities? Sliding scale 0-10 Very unsatisfied Very satisfied.

Please identify what changes can be made to how children and young people participate in decision-making in local communities. **200 words maximum**

Question 2. How satisfied are you with how children and young people are supported to participate in decision-making in education? Sliding scale 0-10 Very unsatisfied Very satisfied.

Please identify what changes can be made to how children and young people participate in decision-making in education.

Question 3. How satisfied are you with how children and young people are supported to participate in decision-making in health and social services? Sliding scale 0-10 Very unsatisfied Very satisfied
Please identify what changes can be made to how children and young people participate in health and social services.

Question 4. How satisfied are you with how children and young people are supported to participate in decision-making in the courts and legal system? Sliding scale 0-10 Very unsatisfied Very satisfied

Please identify what changes can be made to how children and young people participate in decision-making in the courts and legal system.

Question 5. In your experience, which groups of children and young people, if any, are under-represented in participating in decisions that affect them?

Question 6. What changes or actions would make it easier for these groups to be more involved in participation and decision-making?

Question 7. Are there any new areas that a Policy Framework for children and young people's participation in decision-making should focus on?

Question 8. Please mark any of the following structures you are familiar with: Comhairle na nÓg/ Dáil na nÓg/ National Youth Assembly on Climate/Other

Question 9. Are you responding as an individual or on behalf of an organisation?

Question 10. Please tell us who you are (tick more than one if relevant): Answer options: Young person (under 18) Young person (18 to 24) Comhairle na nÓg or Youth Assembly Member Policymaker – National Policymaker – Local/ Professional - Working with or on behalf of children and young people/ NGO/ Other - please specify

Appendix 2: NPC Survey Questions

Parent Survey Questions (Base: 598)

1. How satisfied are you with how your child is supported to be part of conversations and decisions about **education**?
2. What supports your child to be part of conversations and the decision-making process about education? (11 pre coded options and an open question)
3. Is there anything that makes it difficult for your child to be part of the conversations and decisions about education?
4. What if anything needs to change, so that all children can be supported to be part of the conversations and decisions about education?
5. Do you think some children are under-represented in decisions that affect them?
6. What supports do you think those children need so that all children are supported to be part of the conversations that affect them?

Children and Young People Survey Questions (Base: 166)

1. Do you get a chance to share your thoughts and ideas, and to be part of the decisions about education? (*like sharing your thoughts and ideas with the student council in your school, making decisions about what subjects you might like to learn about in post-primary school or even sharing your thoughts on what all children learn in schools in Ireland.*)
2. What helps you share your thoughts and ideas and be part of decisions about education?
3. Is there anything that makes it harder for you to share your thoughts and ideas?
4. What would help you share more of your thoughts and ideas?
5. What children do not get a chance to share their thoughts and ideas?
6. What supports do you think those children need so that all children are supported to be part of the conversations that affect them?

Appendix 3: Specific legislation and Policy mentioned in submissions

- Incorporate Art 12 the UNCRC into domestic law
- Progress the implementation of provisions in the Child Care Act (amendment) Act 2022 with regard to participation of children in care proceedings
- Progress the implementation of the Student and Parent Charter Bill
- Implement the outstanding actions from BOBF in relation to consultation on education
- Fully implement all actions from Ryan Report (2009)
- Fully enact the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act (2004)
 - Any review of EPSEN Act should include the issue of student voice and be informed by charters and guidelines from 2004
- The DCEDIY to give consideration to the Assisted Decision-making (Capacity) ACT (for YP aged 18+) which is due to commence in 2023
- Referendum on lowering voting age
 - Give young people the vote at 16 to allow them to choose the people who will represent them/Electoral commission/participative research on extending voting rights to 16- and 17-year-olds.

Appendix 4: Summary of DCEDIY Responses to Question 5 and 6 on Underrepresented CYP

Q5 Underrepresented groups (and issues raised)	Q6 Actions/Changes	Theme
<p>All young people</p> <p>Current structures/forums not attractive to all CYP</p> <p>Seen as Tokenistic</p>	<p>Voice</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage interaction with seldom-heard CYP across all departments • Change voting age to 16 • Collective voice through student councils <p>Awareness raising</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work in schools to highlight importance of decision-making • Educate all on importance of decision-making and their role <p>Training, Education/Awareness raising</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Train in, promote and facilitate participation models from early age • More training and resources for professionals, social workers, teachers and medical staff in participation <p>Resources</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure all forums are inclusive of yp and resourced • Increase funding for youth work to support yp's participation through schools/community/health • More funding for participation officers to work with underrepresented groups • Resource advocacy groups such as ISSU <p>Enhance and maximise structures</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local annual themed fun events to encourage participation • Promote membership of youth assemblies • Create opportunities within all organisations, schools, youth, sport, government bodies <p>Voice and influence</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Better feedback loops to show views taken on board 	<p>Cross Departmental</p> <p>Capacity building</p> <p>Capacity building</p> <p>Funding and resources</p> <p>Enhance participation structures and opportunities</p> <p>Meaningful voice and influence</p>
<p>Early Years</p> <p>Young children under represented</p> <p>Babies and toddlers, pre-schoolers</p> <p>Those that can't speak yet, or haven't developed the communication skills</p>	<p>Proactive engagement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create local easily accessible and fun events • Outreach to young children – don't expect them to come to us • A champion in every agency • More informal processes • Include voice of caregivers • Use CYPSC <p>Appropriate methodologies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Address the communication needs of different developmental ages • Be mindful of culture and ability in design <p>Training</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training for key workers of these children • Have open discussions with them on their lives, needs, hopes, through bodies, groups they engage with in their lives 	<p>Enhance participation structures and opportunities</p> <p>Appropriate methodologies and tools</p> <p>Capacity building</p>

Q5 Underrepresented groups (and issues raised)	Q6 Actions/Changes	Theme
<p>Primary school years</p> <p>CYP aged under 15 have no voice</p> <p>CYP aged 8-14 – have opinions but not mature to know what is in their best interest</p>	<p>Legislation/Policies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policies and SOPs to include child voice <p>Proactive outreach</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More opportunities in local communities • Planned and co-ordinated involvement to help yp understand decisions • Make engagement a day-to-day practice/engagement on issues that matter to them • Utilise youth services/Promote organisations like Foróige <p>Training and support for professionals/adults</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support adults to be enablers for them not gatekeepers • Time for adults/workers to establish relationships with yp • Educate those who work with young children on benefits of participation and means to do it • Key worker training • Teacher trained in CYP’s participation in each school to roll out initiatives • Nominated teacher/participation champion in every school 	<p>Cross Government Approaches</p> <p>Enhance participation structures and opportunities</p> <p>Capacity building</p>
<p>Post-Primary/Teenagers</p> <p>CYP 14-18 and 18-24 yrs affected by Covid-19</p> <p>Secondary school children underrepresented</p> <p>Teenagers not trusted/ viewed negatively by adults</p>	<p>Proactive engagement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proactive response and support needed to encourage involvement in decision-making • Decision-making credits in schools • More representation of 12-18s similar to Older People’s Council • Engagement with local schools on issues that matter to them • Promote and advertise Foróige and CNN <p>Capacity building</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote trust and respect for teens • More tools in curriculum to support decision-making and debating skills; including in Irish language 	<p>Enhance participation Structures and opportunities</p> <p>Capacity building</p>
<p>Shy/Quiet/Unassertive CYP</p> <p>Lack of support given to those unable/not confident to speak out</p> <p>YP not trained in what they are being consulted on</p>	<p>Increase awareness/build skills</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support for those who find it difficult • Explain and support the consultation process • Use UN rights of child to guide consultation by variety of means • Pre workshop support 	<p>Capacity building</p>

Q5 Underrepresented groups (and issues raised)	Q6 Actions/Changes	Theme
	<p>Approaches/Methodologies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Youth-led/needs-led consultations Creative approaches to hear voices <p>Awareness raising</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Simplified information on rights to participation Resources made for and by CYP explaining right to participation <p>Training</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Training and capacity building for workers <p>Feedback</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Feedback opportunities 	<p>Appropriate methodologies and approaches</p> <p>Capacity building</p> <p>Meaningful participation</p>
<p>Migrant CYP</p> <p>Migrants/Refugees/Direct Provision/Asylum</p> <p>Separated children seeking asylum</p> <p>Migrant background</p> <p>Asylum seekers</p> <p>People of colour</p> <p>CYP of parents who do not speak English</p> <p>Under temporary protection and DP are vulnerable due to lack of support resources and services</p> <p>Newcomers to our system and country</p>	<p>Basic needs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Understand needs and vulnerabilities Get services to them in first instance <p>Proactive outreach</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Via youth diversion projects <p>Appropriate Methodologies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> More attention to design of methods re: culture and abilities Use different media Child-friendly methods Information in different languages Interpreters/ Language translation assistance <p>Raise awareness</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Migrant children given opportunities to be aware of their participation rights National media campaign to highlight the benefits of including CYP in decision-making <p>Training and support</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Training and capacity building for workers <p>Monitor and evaluate participation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Audit and look at quotas of representation <p>Resources/funding</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Resources and support for those working with YP in DP to support them. <p>Feedback</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create opportunities for feedback 	<p>Cross Government approach</p> <p>Enhance participation structures and opportunities</p> <p>Appropriate methodologies and approaches</p> <p>Capacity building</p> <p>Research and evidence</p> <p>Funding and resources</p> <p>Meaningful participation</p>

Q5 Underrepresented groups (and issues raised)	Q6 Actions/Changes	Theme
<p>Traveller/Roma CYP</p> <p>Young travellers need more representation</p> <p>Don't expect them to come to us or to complete surveys</p>	<p>Proactive engagement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outreach: Engage with them in their communities • No expectation to travel/to incur cost • Decision makers coming to them rather than reverse • Champion in every agency • Informal participation structure <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Meetings in own communities • Link with youth/vol sector/stat sector <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Garda Youth Diversion Officers – Via Direct Provision – Via youth groups • Peer support groups • Use quotas to ensure representation <p>Capacity building</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training and capacity building for staff • CYP's Information on rights to voice • CYP's skill development via creative arts/cultural activities <p>Methodologies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support to find their voice, build their confidence • Appropriate methodologies • Attention to design/culturally sensitive • Translation/interpreters • Recruit/train peer facilitators • Voice via advocate • Provide communities with robust trusted processes to participate 	<p>Enhance participation structures and opportunities</p> <p>Capacity building</p> <p>Appropriate methodologies and approaches</p>
<p>CYP in care/after care</p>	<p>Meet basic needs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide counselling services <p>Advocates</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Independent advocates outside system – for info and support <p>Approach/methodologies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use child participatory methods to give voice • Child-friendly processes <p>Confidence building</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support to find their voice, build self esteem <p>Awareness raising</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CYP's Information on rights to voice <p>Training of professionals</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure right to voice is more explicit part of professional training in SW services/legal services • Training and capacity building for those who work with them 	<p>Cross Government approaches</p> <p>Enhance opportunities to participate</p> <p>Appropriate methodologies and approaches</p> <p>Capacity building</p>
<p>LGBTQI+ CYP</p>	<p>Proactive engagements</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work via youth services that work with these yp 	<p>Enhance participation structures and opportunities</p>

