

Child Participation Case study

How the Irish Secondary Students Union (ISSU) involved young people in the development of a Charter for Inclusive Schools

1) Background information

The ISSU is the national representative body for school students in the Republic of Ireland. The ISSU is led *by* students, *for* students. The organisation is an agent and a catalyst for change in the Irish education system, seeking to advance education by involving young people actively in all aspects of their education, and thus empowering young people to realise their voice.

The main aims of the ISSU are as follows:

- To provide a transparent, democratic and reliable organisation.
- To provide a collective voice for second-level students and represent second-level students as stakeholders in their education and in society, locally, regionally, nationally and internationally to continually develop a transparent, fair and modern education system.
- To promote equal access to education and to strive for the end of all discrimination and injustice within the Irish education system.
- To empower student councils to be democratic and effective representative bodies within their school communities.
- To work to end the disparity in student services based on socio-economic backgrounds.
- To fight for a fair education system that values each individual and allows them to reach their full potential.
- To actively support and empower individual students and student councils to take action.
- To actively address the challenges and worries faced by students on a local, regional, national and international level.

a) The project on which we involved young people in decision-making

The conducting of a consultation with students to inform the creation of a Charter for Inclusive Schools.

b) The topic on which we were you looking for their views

Diversity and inclusion in Irish second-level schools.

c) The reason we wanted their views



Child Participation Case study

To feed their views and experiences into the creation of a charter

d) The decision-makers that facilitated and listened to their views

Democratically elected student leaders from ISSU

e) The decision-makers responsible for acting on their views (if different from above)

School leadership, the Department of Education

f) The age profile of the young people

12-18

g) Consultation participants

Participants comprised a wide range of second-level students who were members of the Irish Second-Level Students' Union

2) How we gave space, voice, audience and influence to young people's views

SPACE: How we ensured a safe and inclusive space to hear the views of young people at

Things we considered	What we did
The space or setting where we got their views	We conducted the consultation in the international space in Trinity College, Dublin
How we identified young people to be involved	Young people were invited through an open registration promoted throughout the ISSU network
How we involved those who were directly affected by the topic	A number of guest speakers were invited to share their experiences and speak. Event participants were also invited to share their own personal experiences.
How the process was inclusive and accessible	Before attending the event, students and their parents/guardians were given the opportunity to provide information about any additional needs or requirements they had, which was then fed into the preparation and planning for the day.
How we made sure they felt safe to express their views	Students were given opportunities to input in a wider group, but also in smaller peer groups.



Child Participation Case study

VOICE: How we gave young people a voice in decisions

Things we considered	What we did
How we informed young people about the topics on which you wanted their views	The purpose of the consultation and the topics for discussion were included in the title and advertisement of the event.
How we made sure they knew their views would be taken seriously	It was explained by the event coordinators (themselves elected student officers) that their views and opinions would be included in the final charter.
How we informed them about level of influence they could have on decision-making	They were informed about the position, status and work of the Irish Second-Level Students' Union and given an overview of how the charter would/could be implemented.
The method/s you used to get their views and why those methods were chosen	Student leaders facilitated workshop style conversations, resulting in a series of recommendations.
How you made sure they could identify topics they wanted to discuss	The workshops comprised a format of conversation that was not too rigidly stuck to a set agenda.
Please describe the topics and issues they raised	The challenges facing second-level school communities when it comes to diversity and inclusion.

AUDIENCE: How we made sure that there was an audience (decision-makers) for young people's views

Things we considered	What we did
How we developed a report or record of the young people's views	The ISSU compiled a report which outlined the information shared by students during the consultation. The views of student participants were used to inspire the final charter.
How we checked back with them that their views were accurately represented	There were follow-ups with members and consultation attendees before the final draft was completed.
How we involved the decision-makers who are responsible for influencing change	We invited key education stakeholders to the launch of the charter, including oppositional spokespersons for education, DES officials, and members of other unions in the sector.
At what point we involved decision makers other than yourself in the process	After and during the launch, all those involved in the sector were asked to work to implement and share the charter in the respective networks, which they did.
How we and other decision-makers showed our commitment to listening to,	The ISSU put the views of consultation participants and their recommendations to the very fore of the finished product.

Child Participation Case study

and acting on young people's views	
How we supported young people to play a role in communicating their own views to decision-makers	The ISSU conducted a workshop on public speaking to encourage them to spread awareness about this issue for themselves.

INFLUENCE: How we made sure that young people's views were taken seriously

Things we considered	What we did
How young people were given updates at key points in the development of the Charter	We conducted follow-ups with some members and attendees and invited a number of consultation participants to the launch. A printed copy of the Charter was also sent to all member schools.
How their views were acted on by the appropriate decision-makers	The views of consultation participants were shared with school leadership and Department of Education officials.
How they were given full and age-appropriate feedback explaining how their views were used (or not) and the reasons for decisions taken	Young people led this project entirely and were involved throughout the entire process.

IMPACT

What changes were made because of young people giving their views?

The completed charter received attention across the education community in Ireland and won the Charlemagne Youth Prize.

A physical copy of the charter was distributed to all ISSU member schools across the country, and student councils were asked to display it prominently within the school. They were also asked to work to implement the recommendations as set out in the charter.

3) The learning for our organisation

1. The key learning from the process and outcome of involving young people in this project

This model was used on a number of occasions again. It is clear that one consultation event with young people can yield a very strong set of recommendations and ideas.



2. Looking back, how did the final outcome compare with our initial assumptions and those of other decision-makers involved in the process?

We were unsure of how the development of the charter would go as this was not a model we used widely before.

3. What worked well?

The project being 100% youth led from start to finish.

4. If we were doing it again, is there anything we would do differently?

No!

