



Report on Consultation with Young Carers

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Summary

REASON FOR CONSULTATION

The Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY) is currently developing a new policy framework for children and young. As different groups of children and young people may face specific difficulties, DCEIDY felt it was important to seek the views of groups of children and young people who may not have been included in recent Government consultations on this topic. These groups include children and young people from minority ethnic backgrounds, young carers, and homeless young people. This report presents the findings of the consultations with young carers from across Ireland.

AIM OF THE CONSULTATION

The Government wanted to hear the young people's views on living in Ireland today, what was good, not so good, and what could be improved. The consultation asked the same questions which were developed and piloted by young people for the UNCRRC '[What We Think](#)' consultation.

The Consultation Questions

- 1 What is the best thing about being a young person in Ireland today?**
- 2 What do you not like about being a young person in Ireland?**
- 3 What is the one thing you would change for young people in Ireland?**

HOW WERE THE YOUNG PEOPLE CONSULTED?

The National Participation Office and Hub na nOg team designed a consultation approach for both online and face to face delivery. Working from a children's rights-based approach and reflected the recently published Participation Framework¹, the consultation used activities designed to place young people at their ease and to ensure they felt comfortable expressing their views and opinions.

The consultation with children aged 7-10 years was conducted in person, and the two consultations with the older children were conducted online. The facilitator provided the participants with a background to the consultation and explained the consultation process - why it was taking place, who will listen to their views (i.e., the audience) and how their views and opinions will be shared and used (i.e., the influence).

¹ <https://hubnanÓg.ie/participation-framework/>

The consultation had three activities. In the first activity, the daily lifeline, facilitators asked participants to think about their daily lives and to draw or write about a typical. This provided a snapshot of young carers' daily lives. In Activity 2, the young people discussed what was good and not so good about living in Ireland, before giving their suggestions of changes to improve the lives of children and young people in Ireland. In Activity 3, the older young people (the online groups) gave their opinions on how young people's rights are valued in Ireland.

Consultation Activities

Activity 1: Lifelines of Everyday Activities

Activity 2: World Cafe Method to explore the 3 consultation questions

Activity 3: Are children and young people's rights valued in Ireland? Short survey and discussion (online session only)

WHO WAS CONSULTED?

In total, 15 young carers aged between 7 and 23 years took part in the consultation. They came from across the country including Donegal, Dublin, Kilkenny, Louth, Meath, Monaghan, and Offaly. Whilst the participants were not asked directly about the nature of their caring responsibilities it was evident from the discussions that this ranged from helping care for siblings with special educational needs/disabilities to helping with the day-to-day care of a parent with a serious illness.

The specific needs of young carers

Throughout the discussions with the older age groups (Group 2 and Group 3), the young people described some of the additional challenges that young carers face in Ireland today.

- **Lack of understanding of young carers' responsibilities**
 - Schools' lack of understanding and awareness of the pressures and responsibilities on young carers in the home setting, and how this impacts their daily lives (including focusing on school work)
 - Teachers' lack of understanding of young carers specific needs e.g., need to take phone calls during the day, not being able to complete homework (due to caring demands) or having to take time off school to accompany family member to medical appointments.
 - Lack of counselling or support within schools
- **Stigma attached to disability and special education needs**
 - Continued stigma attached to disability/special education needs
- **Access to Healthcare and support**
 - Need to fight for services for sibling with special needs – e.g., respite, speech and language, occupational therapy etc.
 - Need to access emergencies services
- **Cost of living**
 - Impact of parents' fulltime carer role on family income.
 - Parents cannot afford the additional money needed to support child complete 3rd level education
 - Need to be able to access a car/transport to bring parents/siblings to hospital appointments.

SUMMARY

The young people's descriptions of what is good about living in Ireland, what is not so good, and what might be improved covered a broad range of issues including education, recreation and leisure, employment, health, and housing.

The young people described several positive aspects of living in Ireland with most basic rights being met e.g. living in a safe country, access to education, freedom from responsibilities (e.g., tax), friends and social life, education (e.g., access to 3rd level education and different options). They appreciated the sense of community that exists in Ireland as well as the different recreational

facilities available to children and young people e.g., sports clubs/youth clubs/GAA/activity parks.

Some talked about the increased openness to discuss mental health.

Thinking about what is not so good about living in Ireland, the young people identified problems with education (e.g., stress of exams/school work, choice of subjects, not enough support for students, need for support with mental health, pressure to take traditional career paths), the lack of acceptance of difference (e.g., disability), the lack of services for people with disabilities, the housing crisis, the cost of living, deficiencies in healthcare, and lack of voice.

The young people suggested changes to address the problems with the education system (e.g., reform the examination system, more counselling in schools, greater emphasis on 'real life; skills), the housing need, cost of living, and poor support for people with disabilities. They also called for improvement in the support for 3rd level, more employment opportunities, and giving young people a greater voice.

Abbreviations

BOBF	Better Outcome Brighter Futures
CYP	Children and Young People
DCEDIY	Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth
HNN	Hub na nÓg
NPO	National Participation Office
SEN	Special Educational Needs
SUSI	Student Universal Support Ireland (3 rd Level Grant)

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Glossary

Young Carer	<p>Young carers are children and young people who provide care for a parent, sibling, friend or other close relation who has an illness or disability which may include mental illness or a problem with substance misuse. Young carers provide support in their family by helping with taking on extra, usually adult, responsibilities including dispensing medication, feeding, personal care, dressing, or making sure the bills have been paid. The level of care provided may vary depending on the family situation and the needs of the person being cared for. They may also help the family in other ways, like looking after brothers and sisters, shopping for food, doing extra washing, or preparing dinner.</p> <p>Young carers have been identified as a group at risk of social exclusion, additional health problems, including mental health difficulties, and curtailed opportunities in progressing through education and the workplace (Source: Care Alliance)</p>
SUSI Grant	<p>Student Universal Support Ireland (SUSI) is Ireland's national awarding authority for all further and higher education grants. SUSI offers funding to eligible students, from school leavers to mature students returning to education, in approved full time third level courses.</p> <p>SUSI administers funding in line with the legislation as set out in the Student Support Act 2011, the Student Grant Scheme 2022 and Student Support Regulations 2022 final</p>

1. Background and Introduction

1.1 Background

The Government's cross departmental policy on children and young people, [*Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures \(BOBF\): the National Policy Framework for Children and Young People 2014-2020*](#), concluded at the end of 2020. The Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY) is currently developing a new policy framework for children and young people to cover the period from 2023 to 2028. This new policy framework is intended to support cross-government work for children and young people over the period 2023-2028, and support children and young people to realise their rights. It strives to place children and young people at the centre of policy, while also addressing the most pressing issues for children and young people, now and over the lifetime of the framework.

In order to develop this framework, DCEDIY carefully evaluated the many recent consultations that Government has undertaken, particularly with children and young people. This includes the recent "What WE Think"² suite of reports, conducted to inform Ireland's reports on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, the UN Convention of the Rights of People with Disabilities and the Universal Periodic Review, and in the context of the development of the new policy framework. Many recent consultations agree on the most pressing issues facing children and young people, and it is important that these views are reflected in the policy framework.

DCEDIY also acknowledged that further consultations specifically on the new policy framework were necessary, with children and young people, parents, and those working in this sector. In January 2022, the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, Roderic O'Gorman T.D. launched an open, public consultation on the framework seeking the views of the public on what is going well for children and young people, what is not going well, and what the priorities of the new policy framework should be.

DCEDIY is aware that there may be specific adversities faced by different cohorts of children and young people and developing a greater understanding of these issues will help to address them. Thus, DCEDIY felt it was important to specifically seek the views of some groups of young people the Government may not have specifically consulted on these topics before. These include children and young people from minority ethnic backgrounds, young carers, and homeless young people.

² <https://www.gov.ie/en/press-release/f01ce-minister-ogorman-launches-the-what-we-think-suite-of-reports/#:~:text=The%20%E2%80%9CWhat%20WE%20Think%E2%80%9D%20suite%20of%20reports%20comp%20rises%3A,the%20form%20of%20four%20posters>

The new policy framework for children and young people is due for publication early in 2023. Recently, DCEDIY published a blueprint³ for the strategy, setting out the approach the department will take with the policy framework. As well as setting out the vision and principles of the framework, the blueprint provides more detail on the aims it will pursue, and the ways in which we can realise these aims, ultimately to improve the lives of children and young people.

1.2 This Report

This report is one of a series of consultations with young people undertaken to inform the development of the new policy framework for children and young people. The report provides an overview of the consultation methodology before presenting the findings from online and face to face consultations with 15 young carers from across Ireland.

<https://assets.gov.ie/232106/7d9ef26f-aeed-49f3-af95-f6fbc1fa6b61.pdf>

2. Structure of the Consultation with Young Carers

2.1 Recruitment to the Study

The recruitment process was designed to uphold the best interest of the young people, and to make the consultation a positive experience for them. To capture the views of a range of young carers, Hub na nÓg and the NPO team worked with practitioners from [Family Carers Ireland](#) to recruit young people to the consultations. Young carer support workers were asked to recruit the young people and to complete the consent and assent procedures.

- Written and verbal information about the consultation was provided to all participants
- Consent and assent forms were received for all those under the age of 18
- Consent forms were received for all those over the age of 18
- The voluntary nature of the participation was stressed throughout the process. Participants were assured that they could stop participating at any stage of the consultation without the need for explanation.
- To create a safe space for the young people, staff from Family Carers Ireland also attended the consultation (online and in-person).

Bearing in mind the young people's caring responsibilities, two of the consultations were conducted online (one with young people aged between 12 and 17 years, and second with young carers aged between 18 and 24 years). However, it was agreed that a group based in-person consultation was more appropriate for the younger carers (those aged between 7 and 10 years). The same questions were asked of all three groups of young people. For all three consultations, the young people were supported by a support worker.

Box 1: The Consultation Questions

- 4 What is the best thing about being a young person in Ireland today?**
- 5 What do you not like about being a young person in Ireland?**
- 6 What is the one thing you would change for young people in Ireland?**

2.2 Design of the consultation

The project team (see Appendix 2) designed a consultation approach for both online and face to face delivery. The questions that had been developed and piloted by young people for the UNCRC consultation were used to secure children and young people's views on what was going well for children and young people in Ireland, and what might be improved (See Box 1).

Working from a children’s rights-based approach and reflecting Lundy’s Model of child participation and the recently published Participation Framework⁴, the consultation used a series of activities designed to place participants at their ease and to ensure they felt comfortable expressing their views and opinions (see Box 2).

2.3 Format of consultations

The consultation with children aged 7-10 years was conducted in person, and two consultations with the older children were conducted online. In all the consultations, after introducing the adults in the room (virtual or in person), the lead facilitator provided the participants with a background to the consultation. Using a diagram (Figure 1), the facilitator explained the consultation process, why it was taking place, who will listen to their views (i.e., the audience) and how their views and opinions will be shared and used (i.e., the influence) (see Appendix 1 for summary).

Figure 1: Diagram used to explain the process of audience and influence



After the children and young people introduced themselves, the facilitator reminded the group of Hub na nÓg’s and Foróige’s safeguarding policy⁵ and established a group contract. This contract highlighted the importance of having fair, respectful, engaged, and honest discussions. The facilitator also outlined some of the boundaries around sharing personal experiences. This was followed by some icebreaker activities to place the young people at ease with the group activities.

The consultation had four activities (see Box 2). In the first activity, the daily lifeline, facilitators asked participants to think about their daily lives and to provide a short description of this in words

⁴ <https://hubnanÓg.ie/participation-framework/>

⁵ <https://www.foroige.ie/about/foroiges-child-safeguarding-statement>

or on a drawing⁶. For the in-person consultation, the children were provided with worksheets to complete.

In the second activity, the world café activity, participants were asked to consider each of the 3 consultation questions⁷. They were asked to think about each question and to note down key points. The facilitator then asked the group to share their thoughts for each of the questions. For the online approach, participants were offered the opportunity to add their points to a shared screen which were then discussed by the group. In the in-person session, the children were asked to write down (or have the facilitator to scribe) their views on each question. This was followed by a group discussion where the participants shared their answers on the Tablemat and talked about some of the messages shared. The children were then asked to place 3 sticky dots on the 3 statements they agree with most. This was repeated twice to see if there was common theme emerged.

For the third activity, in the online sessions, the young people were asked to give a score between 1 (lowest) and 10 (highest) on how well young people's rights are valued in Ireland. This was discussed by the group.

In the final session, all participants (in person and online) were asked to evaluate how the session went, with specific questions on Space, Voice, Audience and Influence.

At the close to the sessions participants were thanked for their involvement and the facilitators stayed on the call for any questions

Box 2: Consultation Activities

Activity 1: Lifelines of Everyday Activities

Activity 2: World Cafe Method to explore the 3 consultation questions

Activity 3: Are children and young people's rights valued in Ireland? Short survey and discussion (online session only)

Activity 4: Evaluation of session

⁶ In the online consultation the young people were asked to share their drawings via email or Whatsapp.

⁷ In the online consultation the three questions were shared on the Zoom chatbox.

3. Consultation Findings

3.1 Who took part?

In total, 15 young carers participated in the consultation (Table 1 for profile). The children and young people, aged between 7 and 23 years, came from across the country including Donegal, Dublin, Kilkenny, Louth, Meath, Monaghan, and Offaly. Whilst the participants were not asked directly about the nature of their caring responsibilities it was evident from the discussions that this ranged from helping out with siblings with special educational needs/disability to the day-to-day care of a parent with a serious illness/life limiting condition.

Table 1: Profile of attendees attending each of the groups.

Group 1: In Person	Group 2: Online	Group 3: Online	Total
7-10 years <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 1 aged 7 ● 2 aged 9 ● 2 aged 10 3 females/2 males	13-17 years <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 1 aged 13 years ● 1 aged 14 years ● 2 aged 15 years ● 2 aged 17 years 2 females/4 males	18-24 years <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 1 aged 18 ● 2 aged 19 ● 1 aged 23 1 females/3 males	6 Females 9 Males
n=5	n=6	n=4	N=15
Facilitated by 1 HNO and 1 NPO Staff Attended by 2 support workers	Facilitated by 2 HNO staff Attended by 1 support workers & the report writer	Facilitated by 2 HNO staff Attended by 1 support worker & the report writer	

3.2 Activity 1: Lifelines

In this activity the participants shared examples of how in their daily lives their basic rights (e.g., education, home/family, food, leisure etc) were met (See Figure 2a and Figure 2b for examples). The lifelines also provided an insight into how as young carers they took on responsibilities to care for siblings with disabilities and/or cared for a parent with a life limiting condition.

Figure 2a: Example of completed lifeline (Group 1)

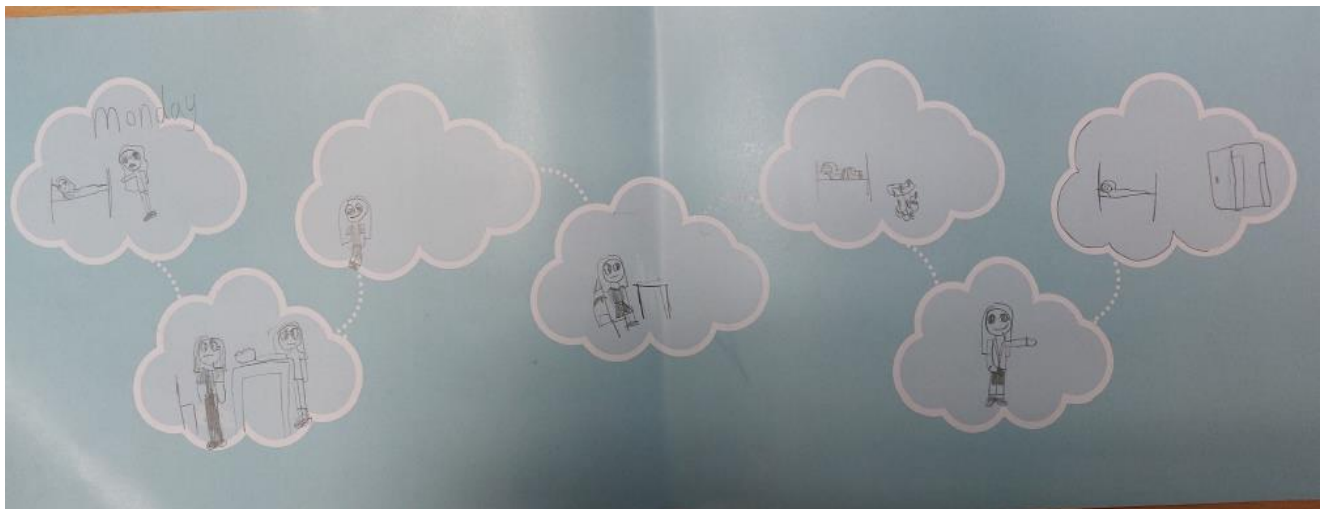
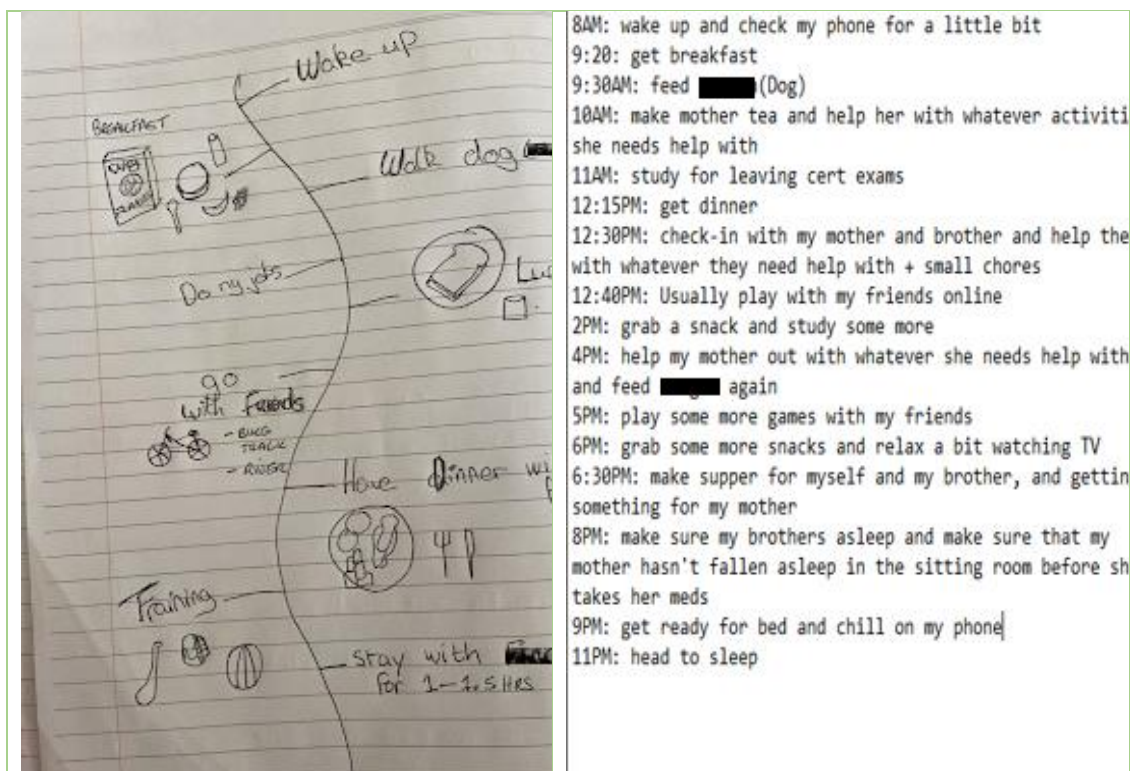
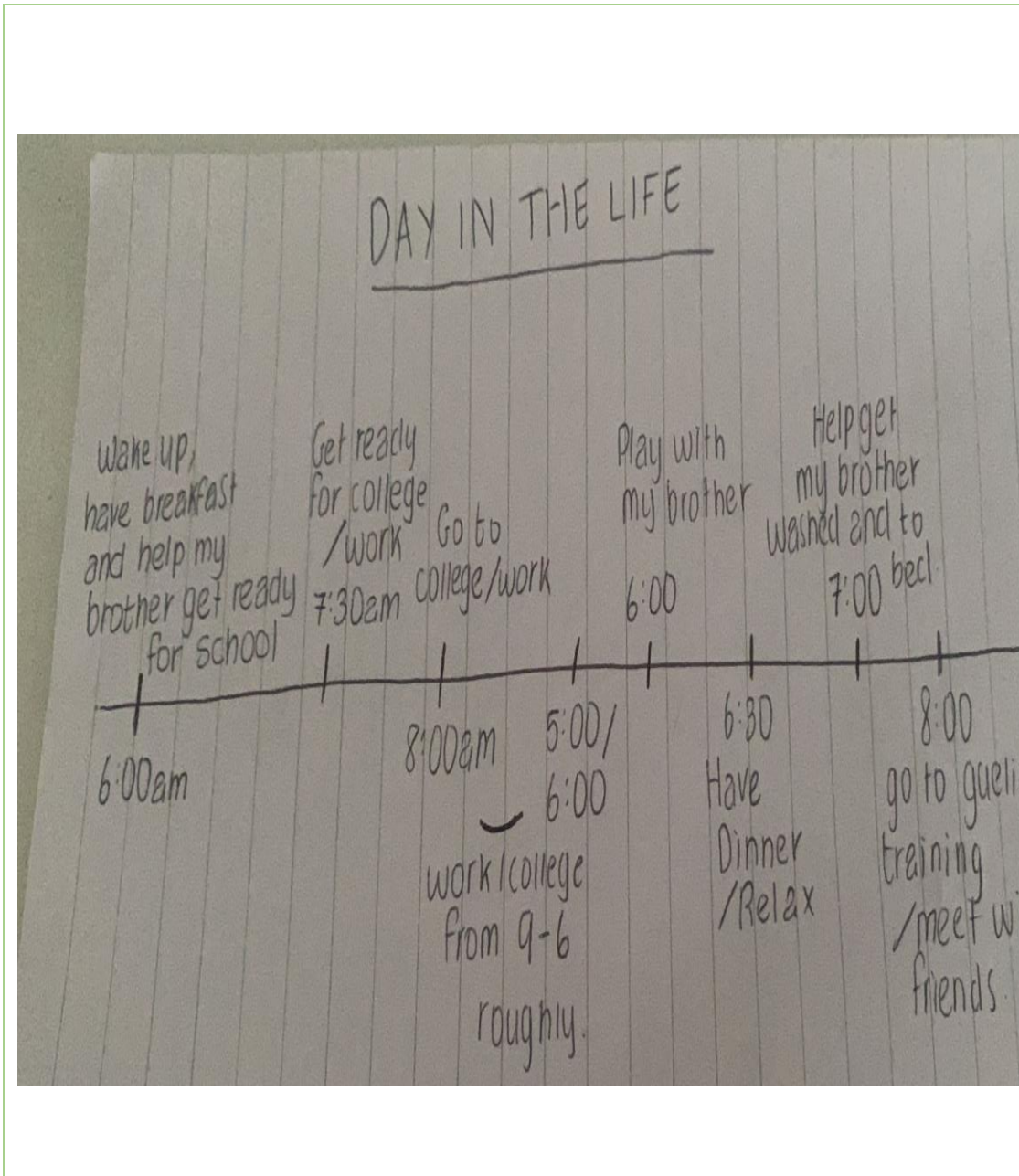


Figure 2b: Example of Lifelines (Group 2 and Group 3)





3.3 Activity 2: World Café

For ease of presentation, and to identify the dominant messages emerging from the three groups, the report writer has combined the messages from all the groups for each question into a table (see Table 2).

Table 2: Summary of messages for each of the three questions

Combined messages (all groups)		
What is the best thing about being a young person in Ireland today?	What do you not like about being a young people in Ireland?	What is the one thing you would change for young people in Ireland?
<p>Most basic rights met</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Peaceful country/Safe community <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Low crime rates Freedom for family, friends and sports Freedom from responsibility <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Nothing to worry about (for most young people) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Don't have to pay for things Don't have to pay tax Friends <p>Living in Ireland</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Great country/Sense of community/Climate <p>Mental health</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> More openness to express emotions. <p>Travel</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cheaper travel option <p>Education opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Opportunities to go to 3rd level education/pursue a career <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Different options e.g., college, apprenticeships etc) Grants for 3rd level (not all countries have grants) <p>Recreation and leisure</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Play/TV and games Facilities/Recreational facilities e.g., sports clubs/youth clubs/GAA Activity parks Drama <p>Workplaces</p> <p>Some workplaces are supportive</p>	<p>Lack of acceptance/ judgemental society</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Judgement from others/peer pressure Stigma of disability <p>Ireland is a small island</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Not a lot of career opportunities (if you want to be an actor) <p>Education</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The stress of school work/from state exams <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Junior certificate and Leaving certificate stress. Not enough support for students in schools <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Young carers not being looked after by the education system Pressure to take 'traditional path in life' <p>Housing crisis</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Kids don't have a house <p>Lack of Facilities/Support for people with disabilities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack of facilities for children with special need Speech and language services Respite care <p>Health</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Need to travel distances to access services (specialist/A&E) <p>Cost of living</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rent prices/Cost of food/Buying and running a car <p>Lack of control/voice</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Children can't stay up late Children can't work because of child labour laws Some adults don't listen to children Young people not understood by adults 	<p>Education</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Schools days <ul style="list-style-type: none"> More breaks in the school day/Shorter school days Reform the education system away from exam based to suit different learning styles More emphasis on practical skills – 'real life skills' Mental health support <ul style="list-style-type: none"> More counselling in schools Need for ongoing focus on mental health promotion in schools More support in schools for students <p>Housing</p> <p>Address homeless crisis</p> <p>Leisure and recreation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> More relaxing and fun things to do e.g., roller skate rings. <p>Care for animals</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> More places for animals to live – more places like forests rather than cages <p>Work and employment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Change child labour laws <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Allow children to get jobs at younger age. More job opportunities for young people <p>Cost of living</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reduce the cost of living e.g., rent prices, <p>Children's voice</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Voice of child should be taken seriously Respect the views and opinions of young people Kids should vote

3.3.1 Question 1 What is the best thing about being a young person in Ireland today?

Each of the three groups were asked to identify what was the best thing about being a young person in Ireland (see Figure 3a and 3b for examples and Table 2 for summary of all messages). Participants in all three groups acknowledged that most children and young people have their basic needs met (e.g., education, right to play, freedom from responsibility etc.). The children and young people appreciated the leisure and recreation facilities available (e.g., youth clubs, sports clubs, activity centres etc). The older groups mentioned different options in 3rd level education (e.g., college, apprenticeships etc). One group mentioned the low-cost travel for young people.

*There's nothing to worry about you can live
your best young life (Group 3)*

Be lazy and relax (Group 1)

*Being able to talk about issues that we feel are big and hopefully
being understood (Group 3)*

There is a good sense of community within Ireland (Group 3)

In two of the groups (Group 2 and Group 3) participants described the range of options available to young people at 3rd level and the government grants available to some young people to attend college.

*If you can't get the points, there is a back door to get you into college e.g., PLC
(Group 2)*

*SUSI grants to help some young people go to college. Not all countries have
grants. (Group 3)*

Figure 3a: What is the best thing about being a young person in Ireland today?
(Group 1)



Figure 3b: Example of Padlet outputs
(Question1)
(Group 2)



3.3.2 Question 2 What do you not like about being a young person in Ireland?

In response to the question on what they do not like about being a young person in Ireland, young people in Group 2 and Group 3 talked about the lack of acceptance of difference and poor understanding of disabilities and special needs. One group talked about the stigma of disability.

People are judgemental. (Group 2)

When you are growing up in a house with someone with special needs, people often talk, they know all about you, they can know your business. They can be judgemental even if they don't mean to be. ...for me, lads making comments [about my sibling] and the stigma coming from that was not a nice thing to experience. (Group 3)

The older participants also described education and pressure of exams as something they did not like. Both groups talked about the pressure of doing well in state exams. One young person questioned the pressure placed on everyone to get points, especially those who do not need them for the jobs they want to do or the jobs that are available.

Some people doing the leaving certificate are really stressed out. Some don't need the points they have for the job they have. There's lots of jobs that don't need high points. (Group 3)

Another young people felt that education (3rd level) should be based on ability rather than capacity to pay for it.

Education should be less about money. It should be because you deserve to be there. (Group 3)

In addition to the pressures on academic achievement, one young person talked about the pressure on young people to take a traditional path in life e.g., getting a home, job, getting married. Another talked about the limited opportunities for some career choices (e.g., acting).

In Group 2 (aged 12-17), participants described school's lack of understanding or insight into the pressures on young carers.

Being looked over by the education system as a young carer, teachers staff and schools are all unaware of young carers and how big their role really is (Group 2)

During discussions the young people described teachers' lack of understanding of their family situation. In one instance, the teacher asked for photographic evidence that they were visiting their family member in hospital. Another gave the young person detention for not completing homework.

I didn't have my homework done as I had to get my mam ready for chemo. The teacher didn't believe me and gave me detention. Another day I had my phone as my mam was in hospital and the teacher called me out on it. (Group 2)

Similar to [name of speaker] I had my phone as my mum was having surgery and they took the phone away from me. (Group 2)

Teachers give you a lump of homework and expect you to do it without knowing what you have to do at home (Group 2)

The lack of services for people with special needs / disabilities was a dominant message in two of the groups. Participants described challenges in securing services such as speech and language, occupation therapy. Two young people talked about some of the limitations of respite care. One talked about the distance of the available respite from their home and from the health services their sibling required. Another described how the respite centre would not take their sibling because of the severity of their seizures.

People with special needs have to fight for basic needs and are being overlooked (Group 2)

My sibling took a bad seizure, and the respite centre told us he was too severe and they couldn't manage him if he took another seizure. I just thought that wasn't the best of excuses because if as a 14-year-old without any training I was able to support my mam and das could help when he was having seizures. Carers who are looking after special needs children should be able to manage these situations. (Group 3)

In one of the groups, the young people talked about the need to travel to distances to access emergency services and medical appointments, combined with poor transport in rural areas. One young person described as no one in their family could drive, when they need to access emergency

services, they have to find neighbour to drive them rather than wait for ambulances. Another young person described the double pressures of having a sibling with special needs and a parent with a serious illness who both need to access medical appointments in Dublin.

In all three groups, the young people described how the high cost of living impacts on people's lives (e.g., getting a home, buying food and running a car). In two of the groups, participants described how the current cost of living is placing additional pressures on young people and limits their ability to complete 3rd level education.

Kids don't have a house (Group 1)

Crazy college expenses, by college fees being so large it makes you have to consider your options from as young as 14 and really limits people in what they want to do and achieve (Group 2)

Having to worry about the cost of living from as young as 16/17 for college if you want to live on campus or if you want to travel etc. Young adults shouldn't have to be so worried about rent at age 17 (Group 2)

Cost of living for college students. Going to uni in Dublin for me cost me €1100 per month for accommodation on campus. That's what I deal with, and that's what my parents deal with. Thank God I am fortunate that my parents could afford this. But I know a lot of people that would not be able to afford it. This would be the main thing that is holding people back from pursuing their career and going to college. (Group 3)

The voice of the child and how people were viewed in society was also a theme in the responses. Young children did not like how some adults did not take their views seriously, and the older groups felt young people are not respected.

When you tell your mam/dad something and they brush you off (Group 1)

How society views us, a lot of people disregard the opinions of young people purely because we are young, which I think is unfair as it's our lives that will be directly affected by things happening currently. (Group 2)

3.3.3 Question 3 What is the one thing you would change for young people in Ireland?

Participants in all three groups made recommendations to improve education. The younger children wanted changes to the school days (more breaks/shorter days), but the older participants wanted changes to the exam and assessment system. One young person suggested changes in the curriculum to provide students with ‘real life’ skills (e.g., applying for jobs, loans etc).

Change the education system, not everyone learns the same way and they should encourage that, not turn the exams into a memory game (Group 2)

Practical skills. There is a lack of emphasis on real life skills. You need to be taught for what you will be doing e.g., how to apply for a loan, job etc.skills you need to be doing to help you get by (Group 2)

In two groups (Group 2 and Group 3), the young people wanted to see more support for students in schools. During the discussions the young people talked about the challenges accessing overstretched counselling in schools. They wanted to see mental health awareness provided all year rather than just during ‘Mental health awareness week’.

More support at school. As a teenager you spend most of your time at school. If you are having problems/difficulties at home, and the school don't know about it or help you will struggle. (Group 3)

Actually, realising mental health in schools and not just when it's convenient in "Mental Health Week". It's not something that should only be there for a week (Group 2)

All groups included a suggestion to address some of the impact of cost of living. The younger children wanted to see an end to homelessness, and the older groups would like action on cost of living and its impact on getting lower cost accommodation (particularly for students), cost of groceries and running a car.

The younger children would like changes in labour laws to allow young people to work from a younger age, and young people wanted better opportunities for young people. In two groups (Group 1 and Group 2), participants called for lowering the voting age and more respect for children and young people.

3.4 Activity 3: How are young people’s rights valued in Ireland? (online session only)

In the two online sessions, the young people were asked to complete a short Mentimeter survey asking them to rate how young people’s rights were valued in Ireland (see Figure 4 for example of completed survey).

Figure 4: Summary of completed online survey (Group 2)



Scale: 0 strongly disagree 10 Strongly agree

In Group 2, six participants responded. There was a range of views on the value given to young people’s rights in Ireland today: two young people felt their rights were valued (score 8), two were undecided (score 5) and 2 were less positive (score 0-3). In Group 3, among the three young people who voted, there was a similar spread in views with one participant giving it a score of 3, the second providing a score of 6, and the third providing a more positive score of 9. Where the young people provided low scores, the reasons for this assessment tended to centre on the impact of the high cost of living, challenges accessing 3rd level education, and poor services and support for people with disability (see Table 3 for examples of responses).

Table 3: Summary of discussion after vote (online only)

Vote given	Reason for vote/Discussion
0	<i>Not enough awareness of the needs of young carers</i>
3	<i>Even though we are not the worst in the world, and we do have our legal rights met, and every child in the world should have them. But I do think there are many that are not valued, especially since inflation is so high. People in college can't afford to live somewhere and there's no food. Emigration rates will shoot through the roof. .</i>
4/5	<i>A lot of schools don't understand what is going on for young carers e.g. I didn't have homework completed as I had to get my mum to chemo. Teacher didn't believe me and gave me detention Another day I had to call my mum in hospital and the teacher called me out on it as she</i>

Vote given	Reason for vote/Discussion
	<i>didn't believe me.</i>
6	<i>We could be a lot worse off but some things like right to education are not valued. Like while I get the SUSI grant, it will only pay for a third of my costs of living in Dublin. Also, I don't think enough support is available to young carers.</i>
9	<i>I do think there are a lot of struggles for young people in Ireland, but I do think that legally we are fairly represented and have our rights. I gave a 9 not a 10 as I don't think we are informed enough about them.</i>
Not stated	<i>I care for a sibling with special needs. We have to fight for everything and have to prove all of their needs. Teachers give you a lump of homework and expect you to do it.</i>
Don't know	<i>I didn't know what to vote/Couldn't think of an answer</i>

3.5 Specific messages on the support needs of young carers

Throughout the discussions with the older age groups (Group 2 and Group 3), the young people described some of the additional challenges that young carers face in Ireland today. These include:

- Continued stigma attached to disability/special education needs
- Health care and support
 - Need to fight for services for sibling with special needs – e.g., respite, speech and language, occupational therapy etc.
 - Need to access emergencies services (“*local hospital does not have an emergency service, so we need to travel longer distances in emergency situations*”)
- Schools’ lack of understanding and awareness of the pressures and responsibilities on young carers in the home setting, and how this impacts their daily lives (including focusing on school work)
 - Teachers’ lack of understanding of young carers specific needs e.g., need to take phone calls during the day, not being able to complete homework (due to caring demands) or having to take time off school to accompany family member to medical appointments.
 - Lack of counselling or support within schools
- Cost of living
 - Impact of parents’ need to provide full time care on family income.
 - Parents cannot afford the additional money needed to complete 3rd level education (“*SUSI grant only covers a third of costs*”)
 - Need to be able to access a car/transport to bring parents/siblings to hospital appointments.

3.6 Summary

The young people’s descriptions of what is good about living in Ireland, what is not so good, and what might be improved covered a broad range of issues including education, recreation and leisure, employment, health, and housing.

The young people described several positive aspects of living in Ireland with most basic rights being met e.g. living in a safe country, access to education, freedom from responsibilities (e.g., tax), friends and social life, education (e.g. access to 3rd level education and different options). They appreciated the sense of community that exists in Ireland as well as the different recreational facilities available to children and young people e.g., sports clubs/youth clubs/GAA/activity parks. Some talked about the increased openness to discuss mental health.

Thinking about what is not so good about living in Ireland, the young people identified problems with education (e.g., stress of exams/school work, choice of subjects, not enough support for students, need for support with mental health, pressure to take traditional career paths), the lack of acceptance of difference (e.g., disability), the lack of services for people with disabilities, the housing crisis, the cost of living, deficiencies in healthcare, and lack of voice.

The young people suggested changes to address the problems with the education system (e.g., reform the examination system, more counselling in schools, greater emphasis on 'real life; skills), the housing need, cost of living, and poor support for people with disabilities. They also called for improvement in the support for 3rd level, more employment opportunities, and giving young people a greater voice.

Appendix 1: Background information for participants

- Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures was the national policy framework for children and young people from 2014 to 2020. It was supposed to set out how the Government was supporting children and young people and what the Government was doing to make Ireland a good place for children and young people to grow up.
- There were actions for many different Government departments and agencies like Tusla and the HSE in the framework. The goal of the strategy was to help children and young people achieve 5 National Outcomes. These outcomes were that children and young people are active and healthy, achieving in learning and development, safe, have economic security, and are respected and contributing to the world.
- There was some positive progress for children and young people with this strategy. For the first time, it put children and young people at the centre of everyone's agenda. However, we know there are many issues for lots of children and young people in Ireland.
- The new policy framework should help children and young people to tackle those challenges in their lives. It should also reflect the priorities of children and young people themselves.
- We have already done a general survey, open to all children and young people. This covered what children and young people liked and disliked about Ireland and what their priorities were.
 - However, we also want to use the other consultations the Government has done and address the gaps in our consultations. Specifically, we want to consult young carers on the new policy framework to find out more about their views, preferences and needs.
 - This consultation will be used by us to develop the new policy framework, together with other consultations we've done, and what the data is telling us about what children and young people need.
 - Finally, I wanted to thank you sincerely for participating today on behalf of the Department and especially the team developing this new framework. We know it's really important to hear from children and young people when we develop this, especially those who haven't been specifically consulted before. We're looking forward to hearing what you have to say.

Appendix 2: Project Team

Name	Role/Organisation
Linda O Sullivan	Assistant Principal Officer, DCEDIY & Manager, Hub na nÓg
Renagh Hayden	Participation Manager, National Participation Office
Sharon Buckley	Senior Education & Training Officer, Hub na nÓg
Deborah Sheridan	Coordinator, Hub na nÓg
Sarah Quigley	Youth Participation Officer, Hub na nÓg