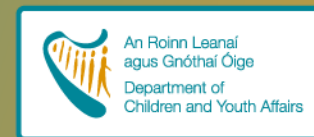


# Department of Children and Youth Affairs



## Development of the National Strategy on Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-Making (2015-2020)

**Council of Europe Conference, April 2016**

# Development of the first National Strategy on Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-Making

## Introduction and Context:

- Builds on developments and achievements of the National Children's Strategy (2000)
- One of the strategies under *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures: the National Policy Framework for Children and Young People (2014-2020)*, in which the voice of the child is a core principle and transformational goal
- **Policy Framework Vision:**  
*'For Ireland to be one of the best small countries in which to grow up and to raise a family and where the rights of all children and young people are respected, protected and fulfilled; where their voices are heard and where they are supported to realise their maximum potential now and in the future.'*

## Strategy development process

1. Consultative and evidence-based approach led by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA)
2. Establishment of a cross departmental-group
3. Literature Review (Kilkelly et al UCC):
  - analyses implementation of voice of the child objectives in the National Children's Strategy (2000)
  - identifies strengths, weaknesses and areas for further development – focus on policy, legislation, structures, practice and evidence
4. Consultation with Children and Young People:
  - 66,700 children and young people
  - *Life as a child and young person in Ireland (2012)* outlines key messages: the importance of education, schools, friendships, activities and sports and concerns about the recession
5. Public Consultation:
  - over 1,000 respondents
  - specific question on children and young people having a voice
  - responses focus on listening, consulting, involving, setting up participatory structures, legislating for children's rights

## Strategy development process (continued)

### 6. Evidence Base

- DCYA *Audit of Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-Making* (2011)
- Evaluation reports of DCYA initiatives: local child councils, youth parliament, consultations and other initiatives
- Commissioned research

### 7. Bi-lateral meetings with Government Departments, agencies and within DCYA

### 8. Bilateral meetings with Ombudsman for Children, Mental Health Commission and Health Information and Quality Authority (HIQA)

### 9. Bilateral consultative meetings with stakeholder groups

- Children's rights sector
- Youth Sector
- Organisers of Comhairle na nÓg
- Young people
- Academics

# Strategy Approach

- **Guided by the Article 12, UNCRC**
- **Takes account of transition to adulthood**
- **Focuses on children in the here and now as the citizens of today and not just the adults of tomorrow**
- **Collective and individual participation**
- **Lundy model of participation**
- **Recommendations from the EU Commission and Council of Europe**
- **Principles from the Council of Europe Recommendations CM/Rec(2012)2 of the Committee of Ministers**
- **Acknowledges Indicators from the Council of Europe draft Child Participation Assessment Tool**
- **Evidence based**

# **‘Voice’ is critical to the realisation of all other rights**

**The United Nations adopted the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1989**

**Ireland become a signatory to the UNCRC in 1992**

**UNCRC – the most ratified human rights convention (194 countries)**

**The Committee on the Rights of the Child has listed a number of rights as critical to the exercise of all other rights. These are the CRC Guiding Principles:**

- **Elimination of discrimination (Article 2)**
- **The best interest of the child (Article 3)**
- **The right of the child to life, survival and development (Article 6)**
- **The right of the child to be heard (Article 12)**

## General Comment Article 12 UNCRC

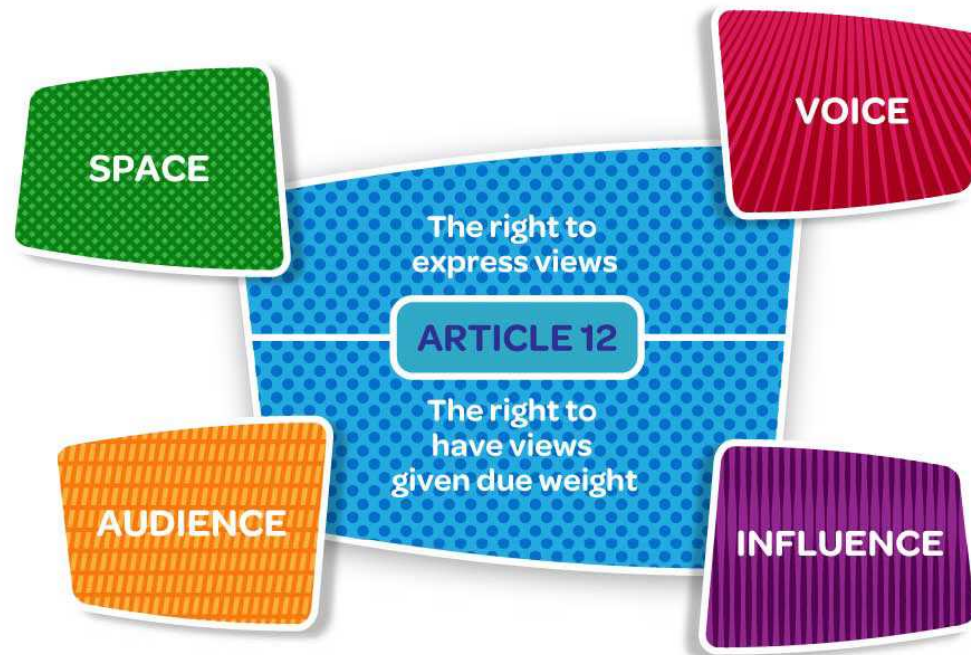
**‘It is not necessary that the child has comprehensive knowledge of all aspects of the matter affecting him or her, but that she or he has sufficient understanding to be capable of appropriately forming her or his views on the matter.’**

**‘State Parties should carefully listen to children’s views wherever their perspective can enhance the quality of solutions’.**

**‘The more the child knows, has experienced and understands, the more the persons legally responsible for the child have to transform direction and guidance into reminders and advice and later to an exchange on an equal footing.’ (Evolving capacities)**

**‘It is important that Governments develop a direct relationship with children, not simply one mediated through non-governmental organisations or human rights institutions’.**

## Model of participation (Lundy)



This model provides a way of conceptualising Article 12 of the UNCRC which is intended to focus decision-makers on the distinct, albeit interrelated, elements of the provision. The four elements have a rational chronological order:

- **SPACE:** Children must be given safe, inclusive opportunities to form and express their view
- **VOICE:** Children must be facilitated to express their view
- **AUDIENCE:** The view must be listened to.
- **INFLUENCE:** The view must be acted upon, as appropriate.



# Voice-model Checklist

## Space

**HOW:** Provide a safe and inclusive space for children to express their views

- Have children's views been actively sought?
- Was there a safe space in which children can express themselves freely?
- Have steps been taken to ensure that all children can take part?

## Voice

**HOW:** Provide appropriate information and facilitate the expression of children's views

- Have children been given the information they need to form a view?
- Do children know that they do not have to take part?
- Have children been given a range of options as to how they might choose to express themselves?

## Audience

**HOW:** Ensure that children's views are communicated to someone with the responsibility to listen

- Is there a process for communicating children's views?
- Do children know who their views are being communicated to?
- Does that person/body have the power to make decisions?

## Influence

**HOW:** Ensure that children's views are taken seriously and acted upon, where appropriate

- Were the children's views considered by those with the power to effect change?
- Are there procedures in place that ensure that the children's views have been taken seriously?
- Have the children and young people been provided with feedback explaining the reasons for decisions taken?

## Goal, Focus and Priorities of Strategy

- **Strategy Goal:** Children and young people will have a voice in their individual and collective lives across the five national outcome areas
- **Strategy Focus:** The everyday lives of children and young people and the places and spaces where they are entitled to have a voice on decisions that affect their lives
- **Strategy Objectives:**

**Children and young people will have a voice in decision-making:**

1. in their local communities
2. in early education, schools and the wider formal and non-formal education systems
3. that affects their health and wellbeing, including on the health and social services delivered to them
4. in the courts and legal system.

## **Additional Strategy objectives**

- 5. effective leadership to champion and promote participation of children and young people**
- 6. development of education and training for professionals working with and on behalf of children and young people**
- 7. mainstreaming the participation of children and young people in the development of policy, legislation and research**

## Strategy fundamentals

- recognising that children and young people have a right to participate in decisions that affect their lives;
- ensuring the protection and welfare of children and young people in accordance with *Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children (2011)*
- improving and establishing mechanisms to ensure the participation of seldom heard and vulnerable children and young people in decision-making
- collection of data, monitoring and evaluation of all children and young people's participation initiatives

## **Key Strategy Action for the Department of Children and Youth Affairs**

**Establishment of a Participation Hub as a national centre for excellence on children and young people's participation in decision-making to:**

- **support implementation of the Strategy**
- **champion and promote participation**
- **develop and conduct training**
- **document and disseminate learning**
- **establish an online children's participation database**
- **form strategic partnerships with organisations in developing and documenting best practice**

**Progress to date includes:**

- **database is online (<http://www.dcy.gov.ie/Participation-Database/default.asp>)**
- **participation training commences in May 2016**
- **Hub will be fully functioning in early 2017**

## **Fledgling Hub – already started**

- **Groundwork on establishment of the Hub has already started with partnerships:**
  - **DCYA, Department of Health and National University Galway – involving children and young people in development the Health Behaviour of School-Aged Children (HBSC) Survey Ireland, 2014**
  - **DCYA and Barnardos Amplifying Voices Initiative – involving seldom heard children and young people in decision-making**
  - **DCYA and the Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA) – on involving children and young people in decision-making in the GAA**
  - **DCYA and University College Dublin – on documenting and writing up the work of the Comhairle na nÓg National Executive (2014-2015)**

## Conclusion: Implementation and Oversight

- **Leadership will continue to come from the DCYA Citizen Participation Unit in collaboration with other key DCYA units, including Research, Early Years and Youth Affairs**
- **The Participation Hub will be a resource and support for all stakeholders in implementing this strategy**
- **The Participation Strategy will be implemented under the structures established for implementation of *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures***

## References

- *An audit of children and young people's Participation in Decision-making* (2011) ([www.dcy.gov.ie](http://www.dcy.gov.ie))
- *Life as a Child and Young Person in Ireland: Report of a Consultation with children and young people* (2012) ([www.dcy.gov.ie](http://www.dcy.gov.ie))
- *Council of Europe Recommendation CM/Rec(2012)2 of the Committee of Ministers* ([www.coe.int](http://www.coe.int))
- *Better Outcomes Brighter Futures: National Policy Framework for Children and Young People* (2014-2020) ([www.dcy.gov.ie](http://www.dcy.gov.ie))
- *Council of Europe Child Participation Assessment Tool* (2014) ([www.coe.int](http://www.coe.int))
- *Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children* (2011) ([www.dcy.gov.ie](http://www.dcy.gov.ie))
- *National Strategy on Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-making* (2015-2020) ([www.dcy.gov.ie](http://www.dcy.gov.ie))
- *The Health Behaviours in School-Aged Children* (HBSC) 2014 (<http://health.gov.ie/blog/publications/the-health-behaviours-in-school-children-hbsc-survey-2014/>)
- *Children's participation online database* (2016) ([www.dcy.gov.ie](http://www.dcy.gov.ie))