

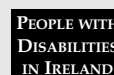
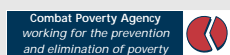
# Hearing Young Voices

**Consulting Children and Young People,  
including those experiencing  
Poverty or other forms of Social Exclusion,  
in relation to Public Policy Development in Ireland**

**Key Issues for Consideration**

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with  
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## Consulting Children and Young People in relation to Public Policy Development in Ireland

“We will struggle with the question of how to include children ... the validity of it ... Those arguments will be discussed again and again and again at all the different levels.” – *Practitioner working with children and young people with physical disabilities in Ireland*

“It’s bedding it into the consciousness ... of adults. ... Because if it’s going to be sustainable ... they need to be having the sort of discussions we’re having. ... I tie it ... back to the vision of what children’s rights means: children as citizens. ... Some concrete meaning has to be given to it.” – *Public policy-maker at national level in Ireland*

“I think society in general will benefit from this. Really, I do.” – *Public policy-maker at national level in Ireland*

“If children were listened to, what could happen? It would be wonderful.” – *Representative of the voluntary youth sector in Ireland<sup>1</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> Excerpts from a series of interviews with policy-makers and practitioners conducted as part of this research study.

This research study has been undertaken by the Children's Rights Alliance in conjunction with the National Youth Council of Ireland and on behalf of the *Open Your Eyes to Child Poverty Initiative*.

The *Open Your Eyes to Child Poverty Initiative* comprises eight organisations that have come together to promote greater awareness of child poverty and to effect change in public policy to eliminate child poverty. A cut-off point of 18 years is used within the *Initiative* when discussing children/young people. The *Initiative* is also underpinned by a commitment to the promotion and implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, ratified by the Irish Government in 1992. Poverty denies children many of their fundamental rights as contained in the Convention.

The eight participating organisations in the *Open Your Eyes to Child Poverty Initiative* are:

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<b>Combat Poverty Agency</b>	Bridgewater Centre, Conynham Road, Dublin 8 Telephone (01) 6706746, Email: <a href="mailto:info@cpa.ie">info@cpa.ie</a> , Website <a href="http://www.cpa.ie">www.cpa.ie</a>
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<b>People with Disabilities in Ireland</b>	Richmond Square, Morning Star Avenue, Dublin 7, Telephone (01) 8721744, Email <a href="mailto:info@pwdi.ie">info@pwdi.ie</a>
<b>Society of St. Vincent de Paul</b>	8 New Cabra Road, Dublin 7, Telephone (01) 8384164, Email <a href="mailto:info@svp.ie">info@svp.ie</a> , Website <a href="http://www.svp.ie">www.svp.ie</a>

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# Foreword

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*Hearing Young Voices* makes an important and timely contribution to the developing effort to ensure that children and young people have the opportunity to be heard in connection with decisions that affect them.

Since the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child came into force in 1990, children's rights advocates and government officials have devoted increasing attention to the implications of Article 12 of the Convention, which states that all children have a right to have their views heard in relation to actions that affect them and that "due weight" must be given to those views in accordance with the age and maturity of the children involved.

In November 2000, to progress the implementation of the Convention in Ireland, the Irish Government launched the National Children's Strategy, a wide-ranging ten-year plan of action addressing the broad spectrum of rights of those under the age of eighteen.

Using language nearly identical to that found in Article 12 of the Convention, the first National Goal of the Children's Strategy states that "children will have a voice in matters that affect them and their views will be given due weight in accordance with their age and maturity."

Making this commitment a reality is the challenge that now must be met.

*Hearing Young Voices* examines both the theory and practice of consultation with children and takes a close look at many of the practical hurdles and obstacles that must be overcome if we are to respect the right of children to be heard. The study pays particular attention to the special circumstances facing children living in poverty or coping with other forms of social exclusion.

The research undertaken consists of interviews with policy-makers and practitioners; focus group consultations with children experiencing or at risk of poverty or social exclusion; a survey of relevant policy-makers and practitioners; an extensive review of the literature on consulting with children; and the gathering of information regarding the actual practice of listening to children and young people, both in Ireland and in other jurisdictions.

Based on this research, the study identifies the key issues related to the development of good practice in this area and makes specific recommendations on creating equitable and sustainable opportunities for meaningful consultation with children and young people. The counterproductive potential of tokenistic consultation is also addressed.

The study provides support for those who maintain that public policies, particularly those affecting children, can only be improved by taking steps to ensure that the voices and unique perspectives of children are heard in connection with the development of those policies.

*Hearing Young Voices* also reminds us that policies that affect children go well beyond traditional 'children's issues' and cover a wide range of financial and resource allocation decisions that constitute the basic framework of public policy development. This is especially true for children experiencing poverty or other forms of social exclusion. Tax and expenditure decisions that may superficially appear to be far removed from issues relating to children may in fact have enormous impacts on the rights and well-being of certain children by undermining the capacity of government to reduce child poverty or to provide equal access to quality health care. Denying children the opportunity to be heard in some meaningful way in relation to such decisions risks trivialising the practice of consultation and discriminating against those most vulnerable to the impact of government actions.

Among the rights recognised by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child are the right to an adequate standard of living, to the highest attainable standard of health, to decent accommodation and to protection from abuse and exploitation. The right to be heard is understood to be one of the underlying principles of the Convention in part because it helps safeguard all the other rights, including those listed above. Insisting that policy-makers and practitioners hear the perspective of children before taking actions that affect those children is a key step to be taken in promoting and protecting the rights of all children, particularly those most affected by public policy and by the decisions and actions of public officials.

*Hearing Young Voices* will help all of us take that step and in doing so advance the effort to make hearing the perspectives of children and young people an integral part of public policy-making in Ireland.

Raymond Dooley  
Chief Executive  
Children's Rights Alliance

On behalf of the partner organisations in the *Open Your Eyes to Child Poverty Initiative*: Barnardos, Children's Rights Alliance, Combat Poverty Agency, Focus Ireland, National Youth Council of Ireland, Pavee Point, People with Disabilities in Ireland and the Society of St. Vincent de Paul.

*Dublin, Ireland*  
2002

# Acknowledgements

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The *Open Your Eyes to Child Poverty Initiative* would like to acknowledge the support of the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation in funding this research study on key issues for consideration in consulting children and young people, including those experiencing poverty or other forms of social exclusion, in relation to public policy developments affecting them at national and local level in Ireland. The *Initiative* also wishes to acknowledge the contributions of Maureen Bassett and Mary Jennings to the formulation of the original research proposal.

The researchers would like to express their gratitude to all those individuals and organisations that contributed to this study by providing information on past and present opportunities for children and young people to be consulted, including at the level of public policy development. The researchers are particularly grateful to those policy-makers and practitioners who completed the survey or participated in the interviews that formed part of the research for this study. The information and viewpoints they shared proved invaluable at a time when work in this field is in its infancy in Ireland and documentation relating to this theme is not readily available. The researchers are especially indebted to the children and young people who participated in the ten focus group consultations that were conducted as part of the research for this study. We are most grateful to them for their willingness to express their views and ideas and for the patience, enthusiasm and frankness they exhibited in doing so. Finally, the researchers wish to acknowledge the role played by members of the Advisory Group established for the purposes of this research project, namely: Ray Dooley, Dáithí Downey, Dónall Geoghegan, Diane Hogan, Joan O'Flynn, Heino Schonfeld and Leona Walker.

The views expressed in this research study are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Combat Poverty Agency.

# Executive Summary

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## Introduction

Funded by the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation and undertaken on behalf of the *Open Your Eyes to Child Poverty Initiative*, this research by the Children's Rights Alliance and the National Youth Council of Ireland was conducted between August 2001 and March 2002. The envisaged aim of the research had been the identification and evaluation of models of good practice for consulting children and young people experiencing poverty or other forms of social exclusion in relation to public policy developments affecting them. This aim was subsequently revised in light of the literature review undertaken as part of the research for this study. A key finding to emerge from the review was that the issues that need to be addressed in the interests of good practice are quasi-universal. They are likely to arise in relation to consultation with all children and young people and all formal consultation processes, including those relating to public policy development. These issues must be responded to, however, in a manner that accommodates the specific needs and capacities of individual children and young people. Thus, although children/young people experiencing poverty/social exclusion may require additional supports to allow for their equitable involvement in consultation, providing for consultation with them should not entail their identification as a generic sub-group of 'children and young people'. Instead, these children and young people should be recognised first and foremost as individuals with distinct needs and abilities. This finding is reflected in the revised aim for this study agreed between the researchers and the Advisory Group for this project: to present key issues for consideration in the development of good practice for consulting children and young people, including those experiencing poverty/social exclusion, in relation to public policy developments affecting them. The findings presented in this report are intended to enable all those whose work impacts on children/young people and with corresponding remit to consult them to reflect on how they might hear the voices of particular children and young people in a manner that is beneficial to all concerned. In this regard, a general recommendation arising from the research is that:

- A non-prescriptive approach be taken to the development of good practice
- An exploratory and child-centred approach be taken to planning, implementing and evaluating consultation with children and young people, including those at risk of or experiencing poverty or other forms of social exclusion.

## Chapter One: Setting the Scene

The last ten years in Ireland has seen the emergence of a more devolved approach to governance, with mechanisms created to enhance the involvement of civil society within Ireland's system of representative democracy. Public policy initiatives relating to poverty and social exclusion are among the legislative and public policy developments that individual citizens and their representative organisations have been consulted on. The status and functions of consultation as a mechanism for involving civil society in public decision-making now warrants a critical evaluation. This is especially desirable in light of provisions within the *National Children's Strategy* that establish 'hearing young voices', including at the level of public decision-making, as a matter of national public policy. Providing for the implementation of Ireland's obligation under the *UN Convention on the Rights of the Child* to uphold the right of children to be heard, Goal One of the Strategy illustrates that understanding and practice in relation to 'hearing young voices' is in its infancy in Ireland. Opportunities have been created for children and young people to be heard in relation to public policy issues affecting them. Among these are a small number of initiatives that have

involved children and young people experiencing poverty/social exclusion. Ireland, however, is only beginning to embark on the process of structurally embedding young voices in relevant policy-making processes at national and local level. This situation is broadly similar to that in other countries: at international, European and country level, children and young people are being heard on a diverse range of issues, but the status of their voices remains tenuous. Furthermore, the findings would suggest that children and young people experiencing or at risk of poverty and social exclusion are among those least likely to be involved in those initiatives that have been created. Among the aspirations of policy-makers and practitioners interviewed for this study is that implementation of Goal One of the *National Children's Strategy* will entail supporting socially excluded children and young people to be heard on an equal footing with their peers and in relation to issues affecting them.

## **Chapter Two: Methodology**

In consultation with the Advisory Group for this project, the researchers agreed that the research for this study would comprise four elements:

- A literature review and information gathering
- A survey of relevant policy-makers and practitioners
- Interviews with policy-makers and practitioners
- Focus group consultations with children and young people.

For the purposes of the literature review, the researchers undertook desk and online research, issued targeted requests for information to relevant statutory agencies and NGOs both in and beyond Ireland, attended two conferences and conducted informal interviews with five individuals working with/for young people out of home. In this way, a large body of information was gathered within a limited timeframe. While some of this information pertains directly to consultation with children/young people experiencing poverty/social exclusion and/or at the level of public policy, most of it relates to consultation with children/young people in the round.

A questionnaire was disseminated to 124 statutory agencies and NGOs working at national, regional and local level in Ireland. Organisations surveyed included Government Departments, County and City Development Boards, Partnership Companies, Health Boards, NGOs working with/for children/young people as well as national voluntary and community organisations with a child/young person and/or social inclusion remit. One key aim of the survey was to supplement information gathered during the literature review on opportunities for children/young people to be consulted. Another aim was to establish policy-makers' and practitioners' attitudes towards the concept of children/young people being consulted at the level of public decision-making. There was a 48% response rate to the survey.

Ten policy-makers and practitioners working with/for children and young people were interviewed. These face-to-face interviews focused on attitudes towards and observations regarding the involvement of children/young people in public policy development. Interviewees were invited to respond to questions relating to the meaning of 'consultation'; the status of consultation as a function of social inclusion; key lessons emerging from their experiences of consulting children/young people; resourcing consultation; and their perspectives on progressing consultation with children/young people desirable outcomes arising from implementation of Goal One of the *National Children's Strategy*.

Focus group consultations were conducted with ten groups of children and young people aged between 7 and 18 years. Most of the sixty-two participants are identifiable as being at risk of or experiencing poverty or other forms of social exclusion. The aim of the focus groups

was to enable children and young people to contribute their views and ideas on good practice to the research. Participants were asked a broad range of questions relating to their attitudes towards having a voice, planning and implementing consultation as well as feedback and evaluation issues. Three methodologies were used: a 'Question & Answer Wall', booklets and graffiti walls. Further to their respective consultations, all participants received thank you letters and interim feedback. They will receive additional feedback upon completion of the 'Voice of the Child' project.

### **Chapter Three: Defining 'Consultation'**

The last thirty years has seen the development of a considerable body of literature on the meaning of 'consultation' as a mode of involving children and young people in decision-making. Hart's 'ladder of participation' is among the best-known models and was chosen for inclusion under Goal One of the *National Children's Strategy*. Other and potentially more appropriate models have since been devised, including Treseder's non-hierarchical and dynamic conception of involving children/young people in decision-making. Findings of the literature review and interviews in relation to the meaning of 'consultation' suggest that there is a need to:

- Arrive at consensus on what 'consultation' ought to mean as a mechanism for involving children and young people in public policy development
- Agree on whether and, if so, what differences ought to exist in our understanding of consultation as a mode of involving children/young people and as a mode of involving adults
- Consider the involvement of children/young people in this process of definition and/or in the translation of an agreed definition into language and formats that are accessible to children/young people
- Agree on what 'taking on board' children's/young people's views ought to mean and whether, in light of its far-reaching implications, a positive action approach should be taken with regard to the treatment of views put forward by children/young people or by children/young people experiencing poverty or other forms of social exclusion.

### **Chapter Four: To Consult or Not to Consult? That is *the* Question**

Despite an increase in the numbers of consultations with children/young people, debate continues as to whether they should be consulted at all, including at the level of public policy development. The common arguments for and against consulting children/young people resemble those put forward in the past with regard to consulting adult members of civil society in relation to public policy. As such, the way in which the debate around consulting children/young people evolves in Ireland should be of interest to all those with an interest in the future status and role(s) of civil society within our representative democracy. The survey and interview findings suggest that there is broad-based support among policy-makers and practitioners for consulting children and young people, with children's/young people's *right* to be heard identified by most survey respondents as the principal 'very significant reason' for consulting them. In addition, there was consensus among interviewees that consultation with socially excluded children and young people might be a function of social inclusion at both a micro level (benefits to the individual child/young person) and/or a macro level (benefits for public policy). Bridging the current gap between rhetoric and reality as regards 'hearing young voices' will require concrete support, in particular funding, facilitation training and the development of good practice guidelines.

### **Chapter Five: Resource Issues**

The principal resource issues that arise are: finance and funding; time and personnel; facilitation training; and providing supports to children/young people. Core findings arising in relation to these issues suggest the need for:

- Clarification on the financial resources required as well as how, by whom and under what conditions funding will be provided to organisations to consult children/young people
- Inclusion policies or equivalents to be drawn up by organisations to ensure that children/young people experiencing or at risk of poverty/social exclusion are not excluded from consultation on financial grounds arising from the costs of additional supports they may require
- Organisations to be aware of the time required to plan, implement and evaluate consultation with children/young people and to commence consultation with children/young people prior to consulting other relevant stakeholders in relation to a given public policy development
- Consideration to be given at both a macro and micro level to how the project of structurally embedding young voices in public policy-making will be staffed
- The development of training programmes for facilitators that take account of varying levels of experience and skills
- Children and young people to be equipped with the knowledge, skills and supports which will enable them to participate equally and to the best of their ability.

## Chapter Six: Ethical Issues

The development of ethically sound practice in relation to consulting children/young people will require that the following issues are addressed: consent from parents/guardians and from children/young people; confidentiality; transparency; equality and inclusion; respect and integrity. The findings arising in relation to these ethical issues suggest that consideration should be given to:

- What parents/guardians should be asked to give their consent to, taking due account of the fact that children/young people have a right to be heard
- In the case of children/young people in residential care and out of home, who consent should be sought from;
- How to promote the principle of voluntary participation among children, young people and adults
- The scope for seeking formal consent from children/young people as well as from their parents/guardians
- The status of “public confidentiality” as an ethical touchstone of good practice
- Whether, in light of *Children First* and *Our Duty to Care*, mandatory reporting should be operational in the context of consulting children/young people in relation to public policy development
- The kinds of information that children/young people require to make an informed choice regarding their involvement in a given consultation and formats in which this information should be provided
- How to provide for ethical approaches to equality/inclusion at the levels of access to, involvement in and outcomes of consultations with children/young people
- Methods of demonstrating respect and integrity to children/young people.

## Chapter Seven: Additional Planning Issues

Additional planning issues warranting consideration are: direct/indirect consultation with children/young people; legal and protection issues; and making contact with children/young people. Findings arising from the research suggest that it will be necessary to consider:

- When and on what grounds children/young people should be consulted directly or indirectly
- How to assist organisations with representing the views of children/young people faithfully and strategically
- Commissioning research into legal and protection issues that arise in relation to consultation with children/young people at the level of public policy (for example, insurance, Garda clearance and mandatory reporting)
- Modes of contacting children/young people that are safe for and acceptable to them
- The development of a preventive approach to tackling the ‘adults as gatekeepers’ issue.

## Chapter Eight: Implementation Issues

The principal implementation issues that arise are:

- What children/young people should be consulted on
- Where they should be consulted
- When and how often they should be consulted
- Who should facilitate consultation with them
- What methods to use to facilitate their involvement.

The findings suggest that among the measures required are:

- Awareness raising among *all* agencies whose work impacts on children/young people of their status as constituents who should be consulted
- Promotion of and support for consultation with children/young people at the level of public policy
- Promotion of children's/young people's involvement in as many stages of a given consultation process as possible
- Promotion of a child-centred approach to:
  - Selecting settings/venues for consultation
  - Timing of consultation
  - Methodologies to facilitate responses from children and young people
- Awareness raising of the key role of facilitation in determining the outcome of consultation with children/young people and of the need for facilitators to be individuals that children/young people trust, feel comfortable with and are respected by.

## Chapter Nine: Feedback and Evaluation

The provision of feedback to children/young people is essential to good practice, with the findings suggesting that failure to provide it can lead children/young people to regard a consultation they have participated in as tokenistic. In the interests of good practice, consideration needs to be given to when to provide feedback; what to provide feedback on; and formats for provision of feedback.

Evaluation is essential if the 'added value' of consultation with children/young people at the level of public policy is to be identified and models of good practice are to be developed. At present, however, consultation with children/young people both in and beyond Ireland is insufficiently evaluated. Those who have evaluated their consultative work have not always involved participating children/young people in their evaluations. It will be necessary, therefore, to promote awareness of the importance of evaluation and of involving children/young people in evaluations. The findings of the focus groups suggest that, where possible, evaluation mechanisms should be negotiated with participating children/young people. Another key recommendation is the establishment of a monitoring and reporting process or equivalent at national level to ensure that key lessons arising from consultative work with children/young people are documented and shared.

## Chapter Ten: Conclusion

The time is ripe for embarking on the project of structurally embedding children's and young people's voices in public policy-making processes affecting them at national and local level in Ireland. Ensuring that this project evolves in the form of meaningful, inclusive and sustainable opportunities for *all* children and young people to be consulted will require effective management of the process at a macro level. The National Children's Office and the National Advisory Council have a lead role to play in this regard. Other key players at a macro level will include Government Departments, County and City Development Boards as well as statutory agencies and national and/or umbrella NGOs working in the area of



poverty/social exclusion or with/for children and young people. In the first instance, these actors might support the development of good practice by:

- Raising awareness among *all* agencies whose work impacts on children/young people of their status as constituents who have a right to be consulted
- Adopting a non-prescriptive approach to encouraging and supporting agencies in their efforts to consult with children/young people in a manner that is in keeping with good practice
- Establishing a monitoring and reporting process or equivalent to ensure that emerging lessons are recorded and disseminated.

While it will be desirable for many of the recommendations arising from the research to be addressed at a macro level in the first instance, individual agencies with a remit to consult with children/young people are advised to consider these recommendations when planning consultation with them.

# Introduction

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## Background to this Study

Following receipt of funding from the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, the *Open Your Eyes to Child Poverty Initiative* commissioned the Children's Rights Alliance and the National Youth Council of Ireland in August 2001 to undertake research on 'Consultation Models with Children on Policy and Poverty'.

Instigated by the Combat Poverty Agency in 1999, the *Initiative* brings together eight national organisations whose work focuses on children and young people and/or poverty. These organisations are: Barnardos, Children's Rights Alliance, Combat Poverty Agency, Focus Ireland, National Youth Council of Ireland, Pavee Point, People with Disabilities in Ireland and the Society of St. Vincent de Paul.

The decision to seek funding for and subsequently commission this research is in keeping with the following objectives of the *Initiative*:

- To include 'the voice of the child' in its work to increase public awareness of child poverty
- To ensure that policy-makers hear this voice and arrive at an enhanced understanding of the importance of consultation with children and how this might be done.

The *Initiative* established an Advisory Group for the research study. In consultation with members of this Group, we agreed that the research would comprise the following elements:

- A literature review and information gathering
- A survey of relevant policy-makers and practitioners
- Face-to-face interviews with policy-makers and practitioners
- Focus group consultations with children and young people experiencing or at risk of poverty or other forms of social exclusion.

These research methodologies were implemented between August 2001 and March 2002. This report comprises findings arising from the four elements of the research and corresponding recommendations.

## Aim of the Study

It had originally been envisaged that the overall aim of the research would be to identify and evaluate models of good practice for consulting children and young people experiencing poverty or other forms of social exclusion in relation to public policy developments affecting them. In consultation with the Advisory Group, we subsequently revised this aim. It was agreed that the revised focus of the research would be the identification of key issues for consideration in the development of good practice for consulting children and young people, including those experiencing poverty or other forms of social exclusion, in relation to public policy development.

These revised terms of reference were prompted by project-related and context-specific factors. Of these factors, findings arising from the literature review conducted during the period August – October 2001 were the most significant. These findings suggested that:

1. The issues that need to be addressed in the interests of good practice are wide-ranging. Taken together, they can be understood as multi-disciplinary, being as they are philosophical, semantic, ideological, socio-cultural, economic, legal, ethical and

practical. Viewed individually, many of these issues are inter-disciplinary. There are, for example, practical, financial and ethical dimensions to the issue of selecting methodologies that will facilitate responses from children and young people. The literature reviewed for this study suggests that there are no clear-cut answers as to how best to respond to many of these issues. In response to the key issue of who might be best placed to facilitate consultation with children and young people, for example, we met with the contrasting yet equally compelling viewpoints that, among other things, an appropriate facilitator will be someone who is known to or, alternatively, not known to the children and young people s/he is facilitating. In light of these findings, we not only realised that good practice cannot be prescribed, but became convinced that a pre-emptive, normative approach might in fact impede its development. A preferable alternative will be to facilitate reflection on the issues that do arise and an exploratory approach to responding to them.

2. The issues that need to be addressed in the interests of good practice are quasi-universal. They are likely to arise in relation to consultation with *all* children and young people and all formal consultation processes, including those relating to public policy development. They must be responded to, however, in a manner that accommodates the specific needs and capacities of individual children and young people. Thus, although children/young people experiencing poverty or other forms of social exclusion may require additional supports to allow for their equitable involvement in consultation, providing for consultation with them should not entail their identification as a generic sub-group of 'children and young people'. Instead, these children and young people should be recognised first and foremost as individuals with distinct needs and abilities that need to be accommodated if consultation with them is to produce beneficial outcomes for all concerned.

Accordingly, this study:

- Names the key issues for consideration in the development of good practice for consulting children and young people at the level of public policy development, with particular reference to children and young people experiencing poverty or other forms of social exclusion
- Makes recommendations on the actions required to progress the creation of meaningful, equitable and sustainable opportunities for all children and young people to be consulted.

By so doing, we intend that the findings presented in this study will:

- Provide a foundation for future, in-depth research into one or more of the issues addressed in this report
- Encourage an approach to consulting children and young people at the level of public policy that is exploratory and child-centred and recognises children and young people as individuals with specific needs and capacities that need to be accommodated
- Facilitate reflection by all statutory organisations and NGOs whose work impacts on children and young people on how they might create opportunities for children and young people to be heard in a manner that is conducive to the production of beneficial outcomes for all concerned.

As such, we are hopeful that this study will be a timely contribution to the implementation of Goal One of the *National Children's Strategy* and the project of structurally embedding young voices in public policy-making processes affecting them.

Karen McAuley and Marian Brattmann

# Chapter One: Setting the Scene

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## 1.1. Consultation: A Function of Public Policy-Making in Ireland

In 2001 a mapping study was published on young people's involvement in public decision-making in Ireland. Recognising that the audience for this study would include people unfamiliar with the infrastructure and modus operandi of public policy-making in this country, the author, Eileen O'Leary, provided a thumbnail sketch of Ireland's structure of governance. She began by pointing out that:

"Governance in Ireland has traditionally been heavily centralised ... Government is usually elected every four to five years and holds most powers at a central level. Government ministerial responsibilities, departments and state agencies are generally structured on a functional basis and are headquartered in Dublin." <sup>2</sup>

Recalling a tradition of centralised governance in Ireland is useful, emphasising as it does the nature and extent of the revised understanding and practice of governance that has been taking shape in this country over the past ten years. Influenced in part by Ireland's active involvement in the European Union (EU) and consistent with similar or equivalent shifts internationally,<sup>3</sup> this shift has entailed the creation of instruments of public decision-making that have aimed to enhance the involvement of civil society and the scope for participatory democracy within Ireland's system of representative democracy.

Ireland's system of Social Partnership is arguably the principal and most prominent sign of this shift towards facilitating the involvement of civil society in public decision-making. Now comprising four 'Pillars' (Employers and Business, Trade Unions, Farming Organisations and the Community and Voluntary Sector), its creation has provided an opportunity for the issues and perspectives of socially excluded people, including socially excluded children and young people, to be articulated. More importantly, and as O'Donnell and Thomas have noted, it has facilitated consideration of these issues and perspectives in the drawing up of the five National Programmes that have emerged from Social Partnership to date: "... the PNR, and its successors, involved far more than centralised wage bargaining. They involved agreement on a wide range of economic and social policies."<sup>4</sup> The significance of both the shift towards involving civil society in public decision-making and, within this, of Social Partnership as a mechanism for enabling the voices of Ireland's socially excluded to be heard at a macro level was posited by a representative from the voluntary youth sector who was interviewed for this research study:

"I think probably the biggest change in the policy-making process has been ... the fact that consultation happens and that we have Partnership ... Having the Community and Voluntary Pillar around the table, ... some of those issues taken seriously and ... some of those socially excluded groups represented there is fabulous ... We never thought we would have been there ten years ago ... I think that needs an evaluation, ... but when you take it over a long period of time, it's definitely progress." -  
*Representative of the voluntary youth sector*

Other developments are also suggestive of a gradual shift towards a more devolved and consultative approach towards governance in Ireland, with the creation of new structures at

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<sup>2</sup> O'Leary, E., *Taking the Initiative: Promoting Young People's Involvement in Public Decision-Making in Ireland* (UK: National Youth Council of Ireland / Carnegie Young People Initiative, 2001), p. 5.

<sup>3</sup> See *Practice to Policy: Models for Involving Excluded People. Learning from five EU Member States* compiled by M. Bassett and L. Costello for the Combat Poverty Agency et al. (Dublin: Combat Poverty Agency, 2000).

<sup>4</sup> O'Donnell, R. and Thomas, D., 'Partnership and Policy-making', in Healy, S. and Reynolds, B. (eds.), *Social Policy in Ireland* (Dublin: Oak Tree Press, 1998), p. 119. The five national agreements are: the Programme for National Recovery (PNR), the Programme for Economic and Social Partnership (PESP), the Programme for Competitiveness and Work (PCW), Partnership 2000 (P2000) and, most recently, the Programme for Prosperity and Fairness (PPF).

local level and within the area of community development<sup>5</sup> being among the most germane from the individual citizen's perspective given the opportunities they afford for enhancing communication between Ireland's public policy-makers and citizens. A recent development in this regard is the local Comhairle na nÓg, the creation of which is provided for in the *National Children's Strategy* (2000). Due to be established during 2002, these local youth councils will act as a forum within which children and young people can contribute to public decision-making at local level.

Indicated by the status of the community and voluntary sector as one of the four pillars of Social Partnership, there has been a growing formal recognition from within government of the role that non-governmental organisations (NGOs) can play in enhancing the effectiveness of public policy-making due to their capacity to represent specific groups, in particular the needs and interests of socially excluded groups whose perspectives have been under-represented in the past. Suggestive of a purposeful effort to improve co-operation and collaboration between the statutory and NGO sectors, this recognition is evidenced in a number of ways – for example:

- Enhanced opportunities for NGOs to make written and oral submissions in relation to proposed legislative changes and public policy developments
- Representation of NGOs on the expert working groups, advisory groups and steering groups that now form part of the infrastructure of public policy design, development, implementation and evaluation at both national and local level in Ireland
- In line with a 1997 EU Communication,<sup>6</sup> the publication by the Government in 2000 of a framework for supporting the future development of the NGO sector, *Supporting Voluntary Activity – A White Paper on a Framework for Supporting Voluntary Activity and for Developing the Relationship between the State and the Community and Voluntary Sector*.

Furthermore, there has been a move on the part of government towards enabling individual citizens to contribute directly to public policy development. Linked, perhaps, to a conception of the citizen as 'customer' and 'client', this move finds its most common expression at present in the increasing number of advertisements placed in the newspapers seeking submissions from individual members of the public as well as organisations on a wide range of legislative and public policy proposals.

## **1.2. Consultation on Poverty and Social Exclusion**

Launched in 1997, the *National Anti-Poverty Strategy* (NAPS) was the first integrated strategy of its kind in Ireland. It aimed to address within a ten year time-frame (1997-2007) several areas of policy affecting the lives of people experiencing poverty and social exclusion: educational disadvantage, unemployment, income adequacy, urban disadvantage and rural poverty. Preparation of the NAPS involved extensive consultation with people experiencing poverty and social exclusion and their representative groups. Subsequent to the launch of the NAPS, consultation was ongoing between the NAPS Unit of the Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs, the Combat Poverty Agency (CPA) and the ten CPA-funded National Anti-Poverty Networks. A return to broad-based consultation in relation to the NAPS was prompted by a commitment to review the Strategy in light of many of its targets having been met. This commitment was articulated in the *Programme for Prosperity and Fairness* (2000-2003), the fifth National Programme drawn up by the Social Partners:

"In consultation with the relevant actors, the National Anti-Poverty Strategy will be updated, the underlying methodology reviewed, the existing targets reviewed and revised where appropriate, and possible new targets, will be considered with the

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<sup>5</sup> For example, Local Area Partnerships, Strategic Policy Committees and, most recently, County and City Development Boards.

<sup>6</sup> EU Commission, *Promoting the Role of Voluntary Organisations and Foundations in Europe* (Brussels, 06.06.1997)

social partners, under the themes of child poverty, women's poverty, health, older people and housing/accommodation."<sup>7</sup>

A nationwide consultation process initiated in April 2001 invited individual citizens and interested organisations within civil society to make submissions relating to a review of targets to combat poverty and disadvantage in the following areas: educational disadvantage, health, housing and accommodation, employment and unemployment, rural poverty, urban disadvantage, and income adequacy. While not providing for the direct involvement of children and young people in the preparation of the Review, this public consultation did afford their representative groups an opportunity to advocate on behalf of children and young people experiencing or at risk of poverty and social exclusion. Accordingly, the *Open Your Eyes to Child Poverty Initiative*, for example, made submissions in relation to health, income adequacy, educational disadvantage and housing with the aim of promoting the status of child poverty as an issue that must be addressed at a macro level within the public policy arena.

Published in February 2002, *Building an Inclusive Society* formally recognises children and young people as one vulnerable group. Under this heading, it includes two commitments to reducing child poverty that are in line with the commitment to eliminate child poverty articulated in the *National Children's Strategy*:

- "Over the period to 2007, the Strategy will aim at reducing the numbers of children who are 'consistently poor' below 2%, and, if possible, eliminating consistent poverty, under the current definition of consistent poverty."
- "The Strategy will aim at reducing the gap in low birth weight rates between children from the lowest and highest socio-economic group by 10% from the current level, by 2007."<sup>8</sup>

In addition, *Building an Inclusive Society* includes commitments in the areas of health, education and housing<sup>9</sup> that are relevant to child poverty and identifies the following as a "key target":

- "To achieve a rate of €150 per week in 2002 terms for the lowest rates of social welfare to be met by 2007 and the appropriate equivalent level of basic child income support (i.e. Child Benefit and Child Dependent Allowances combined) to be set at 33%-35% of the minimum adult social welfare payment rate."<sup>10</sup>

In light of the following factors, it is striking, however, that *Building an Inclusive Society* provides no indication as to whether children and young people will be consulted in relation to one or more aspects of its implementation:

- The aforementioned status of public consultation as an established function of public policy making in Ireland
- The recognition of child poverty as a cross-cutting issue
- The identification of children and young people as a target group in *Building an Inclusive Society*
- The preparation and launch of *Building an Inclusive Society* further to the creation of a *National Children's Strategy* in which creating opportunities for children and young people to be heard on matters affecting them is identified as a 'National Goal'.

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<sup>7</sup> Department of the Taoiseach, *Programme for Prosperity and Fairness* (Dublin: Stationery Office, 2000), p. 79.

<sup>8</sup> Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs (DSCFA), *Building an Inclusive Society: Review of the National Anti-Poverty Strategy under the Programme for Prosperity and Fairness* (Dublin: DSCFA, 2002), p. 14.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, pp. 11-14.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, p. 10.

It remains to be seen whether opportunities will be created within the new NAPS structures for socially excluded children and young people to be heard. And it will be interesting to see whether and, if so, how the City and County Development Boards, for example, combine the roles ascribed to them in *Building an Inclusive Society* and the *National Children's Strategy* to facilitate a contribution from these children and young people to the implementation of the review of the NAPS at local level. Certainly, paragraph 44 of *Building an Inclusive Society* might be seen to entail an implicit recognition of such involvement as desirable: "To become a true national strategy, all sectors of Irish Society – social partners, communities and families – must play their role in ending poverty."<sup>11</sup>

The NAPS and *Building an Inclusive Society* are the principal, but not the only public policy initiatives around poverty and social exclusion in recent years whose development has involved consultation with individuals experiencing poverty and social exclusion and/or with their representative groups. There are well established mechanisms for consultation on national policy relating to poverty and social exclusion - for example, the National Economic and Social Forum (NESF) and the National Economic and Social Council (NESC). In addition, NGOs representing people experiencing poverty and social exclusion have been afforded opportunities to contribute to the development of initiatives aimed at addressing issues such as educational disadvantage, homelessness and health as well as the needs of specific groups such as Travellers, refugees and asylum seekers, and people with disabilities. Within this, relevant NGOs have also been engaged in the drawing up of plans to tackle poverty and social exclusion issues as they pertain to children and young people – for example:

- Initiatives relating to educational disadvantage, such as the *New Deal* and *Breaking the Cycle*
- The Forum on Youth Homelessness<sup>12</sup>
- The review of *YOUTHREACH*, an inter-departmental initiative that aims to create further education, training and employment opportunities for early school leavers<sup>13</sup>
- In relation to youth employment, a code of practice concerning young people's employment in licensed premises published by the Department of Trade, Enterprise and Employment during 2001<sup>14</sup>
- The Traveller Health Advisory Committee, whose recommendations fed into the recently launched national strategy on Traveller health, which aims to safeguard the health of Traveller men, women and children.<sup>15</sup>

### **1.3. The Current Status of Consultation in relation to Public Policy-Making**

Such developments illustrate that the concept of involving civil society in public policy development and the use of consultation as a function of public decision-making is no longer novel: the principle of consultation is now established and the practice of consultation is becoming ever more widespread, with the instruments of civil society (including NGOs) and individual citizens being afforded opportunities to contribute their views and perspectives at different levels and stages of public policy-making and in relation to a plethora of public policy themes.

Now that it has become something of a common currency, it is our view that the use of formal consultation processes to involve civil society would benefit from a critical evaluation.

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid, p. 28.

<sup>12</sup> Northern Area Health Board, *Report of the Forum on Youth Homelessness* (Dublin: Northern Area Health Board, 2000). The findings contained in this report fed into the *Youth Homelessness Strategy* (Dublin: Stationery Office, 2001) published by the Government in 2001.

<sup>13</sup> National Co-ordinators YOUTHREACH, *YOUTHREACH 2000: A Consultative Process. A Report on the Outcomes* (Dublin: YOUTHREACH, 2000). This report occasioned a further consultative process during the period May to December 2001 that focused on establishing a *Quality Framework Initiative for YOUTHREACH*.

<sup>14</sup> Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment et al, *Code of Practice concerning the Employment of Young Persons in Licensed Premises* (Dublin: Stationery Office, 2001).

<sup>15</sup> Department of Health and Children, *Traveller Health: A National Strategy, 2002-2005* (Dublin: Stationery Office, 2002).

The principle of consultation can only be strengthened by a re-examination of its meaning and value from the perspectives of all concerned and through the prism of the experience that has been garnered over the last ten years. Such a re-examination could enhance the future effectiveness of consultation as a function of public decision-making, providing as it would an opportunity to establish:

- Whether and, if so, to what extent an unreflective practice of ‘consultation for consultation’s sake’ may be at work in the domain of public policy development
- Current understandings and expectations of public consultation as a function of public decision-making
- The nature of the ‘added-value’ that consultation is assumed to bring to the development of public policy at both national and local level
- Whether and, if so, to what extent a practice of over-consultation, but under-involvement may have emerged
- Whether current mechanisms for consulting civil society are sufficiently equitable and inclusive.

In relation to this latter point, we believe that a truly equitable and inclusive approach to direct consultation with individual citizens requires that existing mechanisms be enhanced. The public advertisements placed in newspapers, for example, are exclusive to the extent that they assume levels of literacy and knowledge as regards the language and structures of public policy that elude many individual citizens, a disproportionate number of whom are likely to be individuals experiencing poverty and other forms of social exclusion. We would also suggest that work is needed at a macro level to redress the first-among-equals nature of consultation as a mechanism for involving the different sectors of society in public policy-making. That an imbalance of credibility and corresponding authority continues to exist as a challenging reality was emphasised by one national-level public policy-maker interviewed for this study:

“Do I think that children and young people can make a meaningful contribution? The answer to that is yes, I do. But I would say to you very frankly that the presentation of that contribution is something that can’t be taken for granted. We do have a policy-making environment that has a set of very typical characteristics and other voices that don’t conform to those characteristics do have difficulty in making those voices heard. ... [T]heir voices are heard in a different way ... I think that almost the first thing people have to do in that category [is to] establish legitimacy ... There are so many messages coming into the system from so many sources that ... if you start with the handicap of being very, very different, there really is a big fence to jump.” - *Public policy-maker at national level*

We would further argue that an evaluation of mechanisms for involving civil society in public decision-making processes is also required to identify the causes and offset the signs of fatigue that anecdotal evidence would suggest are emerging with regard to structured consultation. Two individuals interviewed for this study spoke briefly, but directly to this phenomenon:

“Consulting with children, you’re taking on a strong moral responsibility for what you’re doing ... It’s bad enough to turn adults cynical, but to turn children cynical ... Adults get their consultation fatigue” - *Public policy-maker at national level*

“I actually have problems with the term consultation anyway because I think it’s terribly broad ... It covers a multitude and it’s one of those things people can just cover themselves with and say ‘Well, we consulted’” - *Representative from the voluntary youth sector*

Evaluating the extent of consultation fatigue and identifying how it might be redressed are essential to ensuring the future health of participatory democracy. Furthermore, such actions are crucial in light of a development that provides the focus for this research study: the



establishment of consultation with children and young people, including in relation to public policy development, as a matter of national public policy. To introduce children and young people to a public policy-making arena jaundiced by consultation would be inauspicious in our view in light of the well-documented alienation of young people from Ireland's institutions and mechanisms of governance and, concurrently, the optimism with which many children and young people will approach their first opportunity to be heard at the level of public decision-making. Viewed from an alternative perspective, this optimism together with the challenge facing public policy-makers, practitioners and others to create meaningful and inclusive mechanisms for children's and young people's involvement might be harnessed as a revitalising opportunity to re-examine existing understanding and practice in relation to consultation as it applies in the round.

## 1.4. Consulting Children and Young People

### 1.4.1. Commitments to Hearing Young Voices

Ten years ago, in September 1992, Ireland ratified the United Nations *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (CRC). By so doing, Ireland made a formal commitment under international law to implement the principles and provisions of the CRC. An internationally agreed framework of minimum standards for the well-being of every child, the CRC defines 41 substantive rights for children and young people under eighteen years of age. These rights are commonly grouped under four themes: survival, development, protection and participation. The latter theme is articulated in particular in Article 12, one of the CRC's four general principles, recognised as such because they are fundamental to the implementation of all rights named in the CRC. Article 12 stipulates the right of all children and young people under eighteen years to be participate in decision-making processes affecting them in accordance with their age and maturity. It is supported by:

- Article 2 - All children are entitled to the rights enshrined in the CRC without discrimination of any kind
- Article 3.1 - The best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration in all actions concerning children
- Article 13 - Children have a right to freedom of information and expression
- Article 14 - Children have a right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion
- Article 15 - Children have a right to freedom of association and peaceful assembly.

Perhaps more so than any other article in the CRC, Article 12 promotes and provides for the recognition of children and young people under eighteen as active subjects with rights as well as recipients of adult care and concern. While action favourable to the vindication of children's rights has been taken in countries throughout the world, the status of children as such and their right to be heard in the context of decision-making processes affecting them remain a practical and psychological challenge at both an institutional and an individual level in the majority of the 191 countries that have ratified the CRC since its adoption by the UN General Assembly in 1989.<sup>16</sup> During the course of this research project, information was gathered which demonstrates, however, that in many European and other countries throughout the world, there are signs of distinct actions, incremental shifts and the makings of meaningful change with regard to enabling children and young people to be heard, including children and young people experiencing poverty and social exclusion. It is worth presenting a small number of examples as a preface to outlining the current status of young voices in Ireland.

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<sup>16</sup> Hodgkin, R. and Newell, P., *Implementation Handbook for the Convention on the Rights of the Child* (Geneva: UNICEF, 1998), p.148 and pp. 151-164.

## Hearing Young Voices at International Level

At international level, children and young people from around the world are participating in international fora and projects. Examples in recent years include:

- The annual UN World Youth Forum<sup>17</sup>
- The International Young People's Participation Program, 2000 sponsored by ECPAT
- The International Forum for Child Welfare's (IFCW) World Forum, 2001 held in Limerick and organised by Barnardos
- The Youth Millennium Project<sup>18</sup>
- The UN Special Session on Children in New York in May 2002<sup>19</sup>
- The International Children's Conference on the Environment in Victoria, British Columbia in May 2002.<sup>20</sup>

Increasing access to and use of the Internet means that the World Wide Web is becoming a new and potentially 'cross-border' forum within which children and young people can articulate their views and experiences.<sup>21</sup> Furthermore, work has been undertaken to provide for the meaningful participation of children and young people in future international fora. Following the International Conference on War-Affected Children held in Winnipeg in September 2000, in which young people, including those with experience in war-affected regions, participated, the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) prepared and disseminated a report in which the approach taken to facilitate young people's involvement in this conference was presented as a case study and a learning tool.<sup>22</sup>

## Hearing Young Voices in Europe

Developments have also been underway at European level. The 1996 *European Convention on the Exercise of Children's Rights* posits the right of children and young people under eighteen years to participate directly or indirectly in judicial proceedings affecting them. More broadly, the *European Charter on the Participation of Children and Young People in Municipal and Regional Life* launched by the Council of Europe in 1992 advocates that local authorities and regions in Europe should implement policies to facilitate children's and young people's participation in community life in such areas as employment, housing and urban affairs, equal opportunities, health, education and training, and socio-cultural activities. A survey undertaken in 1997 to assess the impact of the Charter pointed to its widespread recognition in countries throughout Europe.<sup>23</sup> Initiatives consistent with the spirit and provisions of the Charter include, following Norway's lead, the appointment of Ombudsmen for Children in

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<sup>17</sup> For information on the UN World Youth Forum held in Senegal in August 2001, go to [www.unfoundation.org](http://www.unfoundation.org).

<sup>18</sup> For information on this project, go to [www.youthmillennium.org](http://www.youthmillennium.org).

<sup>19</sup> This UN Special Session was planned for September 2001, but was postponed following the events of September 11 in New York. Children and young people have also been enabled to contribute to the preparatory stages of the UN Special Session on Children. NGOs such as Save the Children have played a key role in preparing for and/or facilitating children's and young people's participation in the preparatory stages and in the Session itself. In Scotland, for example, Save the Children carried out a consultation with over 100 children and young people between the ages of 9 and 18 on the draft outcomes document produced by the UN. Participants included children and young people experiencing or at risk of poverty and other forms of social exclusion – young Gypsy Travellers, young refugees, children with disabilities, and black and ethnic minority children (Scottish Alliance for Children's Rights, *Newsletter* No. 17 (November 2001), p. 3.).

<sup>20</sup> More information on this conference can be found at [www.icccanada2002.org](http://www.icccanada2002.org). Organised in co-operation with the United Nations Environment Programme, this conference is the fourth of its kind. The three previous conferences took place in Eastbourne (1995), Nairobi (1998) and Eastbourne (2000) and arose from the UN Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro in 1992 (Earth Summit) at which national governments were encouraged to be pro-active in seeking children's opinions on environmental issues.

<sup>21</sup> See, for example, the websites of the Scottish Executive ([www.scotland.gov.uk](http://www.scotland.gov.uk) or [www.youthsummit.org.uk](http://www.youthsummit.org.uk)), the U.K. charity Young Voice ([www.young-voice.org](http://www.young-voice.org)) UNICEF, Voices of Youth ([www.unicef.org/youth](http://www.unicef.org/youth)), the BBC World Service ([www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/people/features/childrensrights](http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/people/features/childrensrights)) and Casa Alianza, the Latin American NGO dedicated to the defence and rehabilitation of street children in Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico and Nicaragua ([www.casa-alianza.org](http://www.casa-alianza.org)).

<sup>22</sup> Cockburn, G., *Meaningful Youth Participation in International Conferences: A Case Study of the International Conference on War-Affected Children*. Winnipeg, Canada, September 2000 (Canada: CIDA, 2001).

<sup>23</sup> Roy, A., *Assessment of the Implementation of the European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Municipal and Regional Life* (Strasbourg: Council of Europe, 1997).

Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Sweden and Spain and the organisation of youth councils at local level – for example, local and regional children’s parliaments in Germany,<sup>24</sup> Parish Youth Councils in the UK and Conseils Municipaux des Enfants in France.<sup>25</sup> In the Netherlands, both NGOs and central government have taken action to enable children’s voices to be heard not only through school and youth community councils, but also through referenda. Perhaps the most significant recent initiative at European level has been the consultation that took place with young people aged 15-25 years from EU member states in relation to the preparation of the *European White Paper on Youth*. This consultative process, which sought to reflect the diversity of the social group ‘youth’ and to include young people unaffiliated to youth organisations, is one of four case studies presented later in this chapter.

### **Hearing Young Voices at Country Level**

At country level, diverse actions have been undertaken to provide for and facilitate children’s and young people’s involvement in decision-making relating to issues affecting them, including in the area of public policy at national and local level.<sup>26</sup> In Finland, for example, the principles of the CRC were incorporated into the 1995 Constitution, which states that children “shall be permitted to influence matters affecting them according to their degree of maturity.”<sup>27</sup> In Spain, the right of children to participate in society is contained in a Royal Decree. As noted above, several European countries have established an Office of Ombudsman for Children or equivalent office, a practice that has also taken place further afield – in Australia, for example, New South Wales now has a Commission for Children and Young People, whose mandate includes promoting children’s voices and facilitating children and young people to be heard.<sup>28</sup> Several countries have created national children’s parliaments. Jordan, for example, has a well-established Child Parliament comprising 120 children who are elected on a two-year basis by children and who represent the Kingdom. Likewise, a Children’s Parliament has been in operation in Zimbabwe since 1990. In 2000, its MPs received support from Save the Children to document their experiences and present their vision of how the Parliament might develop into a more representative and effective forum for advocating children’s views in Zimbabwe.<sup>29</sup>

### **Hearing Young Voices in the UK**

Initiatives in the UK are illustrative of the way in which the creation of opportunities for children and young people to be heard frequently involves collaboration between the statutory and NGO sectors. In Scotland, The Scottish Office commissioned Save the Children to undertake a consultation to enable children and young people in Scotland to contribute their perspectives on progress towards implementing the CRC in Scotland as part of preparations for a second national report to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child on the UK’s implementation of the CRC. Forty three groups of children and young people aged between 12 and 18 years, coming from schools and youth groups in urban and rural Scotland, and representing a wide spectrum of interest groups, took part. An initial consultation process, which took place between September and November 1998, was consolidated by a one-day conference held in January 1999, in which children and young people were afforded

<sup>24</sup> Ministerium für Frauen, Jugend, Familie und Gesundheit des Landes Nordrhein-Westfalen, *Dialogverfahren Kinderfreundlichkeit: Ansätze, Erfahrungen, Weiterentwicklungen* (Düsseldorf: Ministerium für Frauen, Jugend, Familie und Gesundheit des Landes NRW, 2000).

<sup>25</sup> For an analytical overview of initiatives to facilitate the voices and views of young people being heard both in and beyond Europe during the 1990s, see H. Matthews, M. Limb and M Taylor, *Young People’s Participation and Representation in Society* (Northampton: University of Northampton, Centre for Children and Youth, March 1998).

<sup>26</sup> A recent report prepared as part of the Carnegie Young People Initiative provides a useful account of opportunities for children and young people to be heard in the context of public decision-making in a number of countries throughout the world, namely: the UK, Barbados, Uganda, Lithuania, Portugal, South Africa, Denmark and Germany. See Mokwena, S. (ed.), *Taking the Initiative: International Perspectives on Young People’s Involvement in Public Decision Making* (London: Carnegie Young People Initiative, 2001).

<sup>27</sup> Save the Children, *Children’s Rights: Reality or Rhetoric?* (London: Save the Children, 2000), p. 12.

<sup>28</sup> For more information, go to [www.kids.nsw.gov.au](http://www.kids.nsw.gov.au).

<sup>29</sup> Background information on the establishment and operation of Zimbabwe’s Children’s Parliament as well as the MPs critical evaluation of it and ideas on how it might be developed can be found in *Our Right to be Heard: Voices from Child Parliamentarians in Zimbabwe* (Harare: Save the Children, 2000).

an opportunity to discuss the outcomes of the consultation with The Scottish Office Minister for Children's Issues. Poverty and its impact on health was one of the themes discussed, with the following quotation suggestive of children's and young people's capacity to speak frankly to such issues:

"If you're [living] in poverty, you can't get better. You can't get better if you've not got a good diet to build you up ... or if you can't pay for heating to keep you warm if you're getting over pneumonia or whatever. Health and poverty are really closely linked."<sup>30</sup>

Subsequently, during May and June 2000, the Scottish Executive and the International Teledemocracy Centre at Napier University collaborated in running a Youth Summit Electronic Consultation. Young people with access to the Internet could find out about the twenty key issues facing young people in Scotland, what other young people had to say on these issues, add their own views and vote on what they felt were the top ten issues for young people in Scotland. This electronic consultation tied in with a Scottish Executive-funded Youth Summit held in June 2000 where young people were enabled to communicate with Scottish Executive Ministers directly and via email on a broad range of issues.<sup>31</sup> Online consultation<sup>32</sup> was also a significant feature of two recent initiatives in Northern Ireland<sup>33</sup> to facilitate children's and young people's involvement in public decision-making:

- The *Consultation with Young People on Physical Punishment in the Home* organised by the Office of Law Reform<sup>34</sup>
- The consultation with children and young people on future roles of the proposed Commissioner for Children organised by the Human Rights Unit of the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister in Northern Ireland.

The latter consultation was designed to enable children and young people to submit their views and ideas on the how the newly created role of Commissioner for Children should be developed and implemented. This online consultation was preceded by two other consultations, a survey involving three small focus groups and a consultation with young people undertaken by Save the Children and the Children's Law Centre.<sup>35</sup> The findings of both consultations were made available to children and young people on a website created for the online consultation ([www.allchildrenni.com](http://www.allchildrenni.com)) and were intended to facilitate reflection by them on the role of the Children's Commissioner. In addition to the online consultation,

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<sup>30</sup> Ritchie, A., *Our Lives Consultation: Final Report* (Edinburgh: Save the Children Scotland, 1999), p. 27.

<sup>31</sup> For information on the results of the consultation, go to [www.teledemocracy.org](http://www.teledemocracy.org). Also see Dorrian, A-M, Tisdall, K. and Hamilton, D., *Taking the Initiative: Promoting Young People's Participation in Public Decision Making in Scotland* (London: Children in Scotland/Carnegie Young People Initiative, 2001), p. 27. As with other reports in this series, this report provides an overview and examples of young people's involvement in public decision-making at national and local level.

<sup>32</sup> The findings of the Infodem project undertaken from November 1999 to January 2000 by the Young People in Neighbourhoods Unit within the National Children's Bureau Development department provides a useful analysis of ICT as a tool for facilitating consultation with children and young people. Providing a range of case studies and a comprehensive list of recommendations on the development of ICT as a tool for consulting children and young people, it raises the issue of whether the use of ICT as a methodology might further curtail rather than enhance the involvement of disadvantaged children and young people in local public decision-making. See Burton, S., *Infodem: Computer Communications as a Tool for extending Young People's Involvement in Local Democracy* (London: National Children's Bureau, 2000).

<sup>33</sup> An overview and additional examples of opportunities for young people in Northern Ireland to be consulted in relation to local and national level public policy developments is provided by R. Green, *Taking the Initiative: Promoting Young People's Involvement in Public Decision Making in Northern Ireland* (UK: Save the Children, NI/Youth Council for NI/Carnegie Young People Initiative, 2001).

<sup>34</sup> Go to [www.olrni.gov.uk/youngpeople](http://www.olrni.gov.uk/youngpeople). Save the Children undertook a consultation with children, parents and professionals in relation to this Consultation in the autumn of 2000. Almost 200 children aged 4-11 years took part, 121 of whom replied to a postal questionnaire distributed through after-school clubs and 68 of whom were talked with via a character called Splodge. In addition 50 young people aged 11-18 years were consulted during a day of workshops organised by Save the Children and the Children's Law Centre. The views of participating children and young people are presented in a Save the Children report, *It's not right to hit children* (Belfast: Save the Children, 2001).

<sup>35</sup> For more information on this consultation, go to [www.childrenslawcentre.org/commin.htm](http://www.childrenslawcentre.org/commin.htm).

the Human Rights Unit facilitated responses from children and young people in other formats. Hard-copy fact sheets prepared by young people involved in the Young Citizens in Action programme<sup>36</sup> were disseminated and a *Facilitators' Guide*<sup>37</sup> comprising information and ideas for activities was developed to enable teachers and youth workers to facilitate workshops around the appointment of the Children's Commissioner. Another recent initiative in Northern Ireland to have entailed collaboration between the statutory and NGO sectors was a consultation with children and young people around the *Bill of Rights* for Northern Ireland. In addition to efforts by the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission to elicit views from children and young people on the *Bill of Rights*,<sup>38</sup> NGOs like Save the Children and the Children's Law Centre facilitated a consultation process, training thirty people working with children and young people from diverse backgrounds<sup>39</sup> so that they might enable these children and young people to contribute their suggestions on the *Bill of Rights*. A total of eighty children and young people from throughout Northern Ireland took part in this *Bill of Rights* project, the conclusion to which saw them meeting with each other and with Commissioners and staff members from the Human Rights Commission in February 2001 to reiterate their views on what the *Bill of Rights* should include for children and young people.<sup>40</sup> Preparation of the *Bill of Rights* also prompted a cross-border initiative that enabled young people from Northern Ireland and the north west of the Republic of Ireland to collaborate in the preparation of recommendations for the Bill.<sup>41</sup>

Among the wide-ranging initiatives underway throughout the UK to facilitate children's and young people's involvement in public policy developments at national level and, more frequently, at local level, are those seeking to enable the voices of children and young people experiencing or at risk of poverty and social exclusion to be heard. To two child-centred studies on child poverty involving children and young people undertaken by the Children's Society<sup>42</sup> has been added, for example, a project on children's experiences of poverty commissioned by the Children's Rights Alliance for England and Save the Children. Presented as a case study in this chapter, *Bread is Free* represents the voices of 106 children and young people aged 5-16 years living in communities with high levels of poverty and social deprivation across England. By facilitating these children and young people to speak of their experiences of poverty and articulate their ideas on what might be done to combat it, the participating organisations aimed to compile evidence for policy-makers and practitioners on the need to involve children and young people in the development of services, programmes and policies aimed at tackling child poverty.<sup>43</sup> Adding to academic research in the field,<sup>44</sup>

<sup>36</sup> This programme is part of the Voluntary Service Belfast Initiative ([www.vsb.org.uk](http://www.vsb.org.uk)). The guide prepared by young people is entitled *A Consultation Paper on a Commissioner for Children for Northern Ireland: A Guide for Children and Young People*. It can be obtained from the Human Rights Unit at the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister.

<sup>37</sup> Human Rights Unit at the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister, *A Consultation Paper on a Commissioner for Children for Northern Ireland: Facilitators' Guide* (n.d.).

<sup>38</sup> The Commission set up a Children's and Young People's Working Group around the Bill of Rights. It also produced an information handbook in which children and young people could find out more about their rights and the Bill of Rights and insert their ideas on what they would like to see in the Bill of Rights. The handbook was designed with a view to enabling children and young people to respond in a variety of ways, "in a poem or story, a drawing or painting – or in another way that suits you." See Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission, *Making a Bill of Rights* (Belfast: NIHRC, October 2001).

<sup>39</sup> Children and young people with disabilities, young parents, children and young people in the care and justice systems, children and young people excluded from school, children and young people directly affected by the conflict in Northern Ireland.

<sup>40</sup> For more information, go to [www.childrenslawcentre.org/bill.htm](http://www.childrenslawcentre.org/bill.htm).

<sup>41</sup> North West Youth/Community Information and Development Programme et al, *Report from the Right to Know Conference* (Letterkenny: NWYCIPD, March 2001).

<sup>42</sup> Davis, J., and Ridge, T., *Same Scenery, Different Lifestyle: Rural Children on a Low Income* (UK: The Children's Society, 1997) and Roker, D., *Worth More Than This: Young People Growing Up in Family Poverty* (UK: The Children's Society, 1998).

<sup>43</sup> Willow, C., *Bread is Free: Children and Young People Talk about Poverty* (London: Children's Rights Alliance for England, July 2001). A similar study, focusing on children's and young people's experiences of poverty in Wales, is due to be published shortly by the Save the Children, Wales Programme. At an EFCW conference in Brussels in January 2002, Tamara van der Hoek presented a paper on the experiences of children experiencing poverty in the



NGOs have endeavoured to facilitate the voices of children and young people with disabilities, a group that is among those at particular risk of social exclusion. In Northern Ireland, for example, Save the Children and Disability Action supported a group of young people with disabilities, Educable, to research the educational experiences of young people with disabilities in Northern Ireland.<sup>45</sup> In England, the *Ask Us* project (1999) led by The Children's Society involved the use of a multi-media approach to enable 200 children and young people with disabilities aged between 4 and 24 years to influence *Quality Projects*, the UK Government's programme for transforming children's services in England. Another recent England-based project is *Two Way Street*. Led by Triangle and the NSPCC and involving a group of nine young people with disabilities, this project resulted in the creation of a training video that aims to develop the skills of professionals in communicating with children with disabilities who do not use speech or language.<sup>46</sup>

To similar or equivalent initiatives in Northern Ireland, Scotland, England and Wales aimed at enabling the voices of specific groups of children and young people at risk of social exclusion to be heard (children and young people with disabilities, from ethnic minorities, in residential care,<sup>47</sup> and so on) can be added the guidelines developed to support consultation with particular groups of children and young people at risk of or experiencing social exclusion. Children in Scotland, for example, is following up on its training manual for professionals on involving children and young people with disabilities in decision-making with a two-year project, in which children are participating, to develop and promote the involvement of children and young people with disabilities in collective decision-making.<sup>48</sup> In Northern Ireland, the Children's Law Centre and Save the Children have created a brief, but broad-based set of guidelines on consulting with "vulnerable young people" – young people living with a disability or long term illness, young people who are or have been in the criminal justice or care systems, young parents, young people from ethnic groups, young carers, young gay people, and homeless young people.<sup>49</sup> Taking a different perspective, but one equally relevant to this study, Save the Children in Scotland has developed and published a comprehensive toolkit for consulting children and young people on policy issues.<sup>50</sup>

Notwithstanding such developments, both understanding and practice with regard to enabling children and young people to be heard and consulted in the context of public decision-making at national and local level remains in its infancy. While many more examples of initiatives at international, European, country and local level might be added to those provided above, it is certainly the case that consultation with children and young people on matters of public policy remains a novel and challenging concept and that much needs to be done if children's and young people's voices are to become structurally

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Netherlands. See van der Hoek, T., *Child Poverty from a Child's Perspective: Personal Experiences and Coping Strategies of Dutch Poor Children* (Netherlands: Department of Sociology, Tilburg University, 2002).

<sup>44</sup> See, for example, Lewis, A., *Children's Understanding of Disability* (London: Routledge, 1995); Wade, B. and Moore, M., *Experiencing Special Education: What Young People with Special Educational Needs can Tell Us* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1993) and Ward, L., *Seen and Heard: Involving Disabled Children and Young People in Research and Development Projects* (York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 1997). The latter publication may be of particular interest to practitioners and policy-makers since it includes a 'checklist for action' for those seeking to involve children and young people with disabilities in projects.

<sup>45</sup> Educable, *No Choice: No Chance. The Educational Experiences of Young People with Disabilities* (Belfast: Save the Children/Disability Action, 2000).

<sup>46</sup> For more information on these two projects, go to [www.jrf.org.uk/knowledge/findings/socialcare/741.asp](http://www.jrf.org.uk/knowledge/findings/socialcare/741.asp).

<sup>47</sup> With regard to children and young people in residential care, two useful studies are Willow, C., *Children's Rights and Participation in Residential Care* (London: National Children's Bureau, 1996) and, more recently, Andrikopoulou, E. (ed.), *Giving a Voice to Young People from Residential Care* (Brussels: EFCW, 2000).

<sup>48</sup> Griffiths, J., Cunningham, G. and Dick, S., *Onwards and Upwards: Involving Disabled Children and Young People in Decision Making. A Training Manual for Professionals* (Edinburgh: Children in Scotland, n.d.). Information on the Citizenship in Practice Project can be obtained from Children in Scotland ([info@childreninscotland.org.uk](mailto:info@childreninscotland.org.uk)).

<sup>49</sup> Children's Law Centre and Save the Children Partnership Project, *Consultation with Vulnerable Young People: Guidelines* (Belfast: CLC/SCF, n.d.). Unpublished document.

<sup>50</sup> Madden, S., *Re: Action Consultation Toolkit. A Practical Toolkit for Consulting with Children and Young People on Policy Issues* (Edinburgh: Save the Children, 2001).

embedded in civil society's deliberations. Moreover, and as the mapping studies undertaken as part of the Carnegie Young People Initiative illustrate, the voices of children and young people experiencing poverty or other forms of social exclusion are under-represented within those opportunities that have been created. In his study of young people's involvement in public decision-making in the UK, Cutler and Frost, for example, note that "socially excluded groups of young people are least likely to be involved".<sup>51</sup> Green, meanwhile, posits that "appropriate mechanisms" need to be developed in Northern Ireland "to involve marginalised or disadvantaged children and young people on an equitable basis to enable them to engage effectively".<sup>52</sup> The situation in Ireland is not dissimilar.

#### 1.4.2. Bringing It All Back Home: Key Instruments and Initiatives in Ireland

In a report on the status of children's rights in Ireland submitted to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child in 1997, the Children's Rights Alliance pointed out that the spirit and letter of Article 12 of the CRC had not been "sufficiently recognised in the running of organisations in Ireland, such as voluntary and community groups, unions or government agencies used by young people."<sup>53</sup> In light of this wording, it is worth noting that prior to the launch of the *National Children's Strategy* in 2000, statutory bodies and NGOs were taking action that directly or indirectly supported young voices being heard. Such actions included:

- Information provision and dissemination to young people<sup>54</sup>
- Public information initiatives on children's rights and the CRC<sup>55</sup>
- The creation of educational materials on or related to children's rights and responsibilities<sup>56</sup>
- Opportunities for children and young people to explore different media of self-expression<sup>57</sup>
- Surveys of and reports on youth opinion on a variety of issues<sup>58</sup>
- Children's and young people's conferences and discussion fora<sup>59</sup>
- Opportunities for children to be heard at conferences for adults<sup>60</sup>
- The inclusion of children's rights education in some training courses for professionals working with children.<sup>61</sup>

Recent years have also seen legislative and policy developments at national level that constitute steps towards enabling children and young people to be heard. Within the context of the formal education sector, for example, there have been enabling curricular innovations

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<sup>51</sup> Cutler, D. and Frost, R., *Taking the Initiative: Promoting Young People's Involvement in Public Decision Making in the UK* (London: Carnegie Young People Initiative, 2000), p. 2.

<sup>52</sup> Green (2001), p. 3.

<sup>53</sup> Kilkelly, U., *Small Voices: Vital Rights* (Dublin: Children's Rights Alliance, 1997), p. 9.

<sup>54</sup> Youth information centres are located throughout the country and are now complemented by the Department of Education and Science website, [www.youthinformation.ie](http://www.youthinformation.ie).

<sup>55</sup> The Children's Rights Alliance, for example, launched the first stage of a public awareness raising and information campaign on the CRC in December 1999. During 2000, the Western Health Board worked with a group of young people in care to develop a *Charter of Rights for Children and Young People in Care*. The resulting booklet, leaflet and poster are intended for use by children and young people in care, their carers and social workers.

<sup>56</sup> State and, in particular, NGO agencies have produced an array of educational materials on or related to local and/or global children's rights issues as well as materials that are in keeping with the aims of education outlined under article 29 of the CRC. These materials are typically anchored in a conception of children and young people as active participants in their own learning and provide information that can assist children and young people with making informed contributions to and/or taking action on issues of interest and relevance to them.

<sup>57</sup> Examples of this kind of activity are the work of Kids' Own Publishing, the Ark as well as community-based initiatives such as the *Creativity in the Classroom* project by the Canal Communities Partnership in Dublin.

<sup>58</sup> See, for example, Wegimont, L. (ed.), *Development and Justice Issues: Irish Attitudes* (Dublin: DEFY/Irish Marketing Surveys, 2000). One striking finding of the report was young people's belief that "they can make a significant contribution at global level, somewhat less so at local level and less again at national level" (p. 9).

<sup>59</sup> Examples of such initiatives might include the NYCI's Youth Parliament, ISPC's Regional Children's Forums, and the Health Promotion Department's Transition Year Student Health Fora (1999/2000).

<sup>60</sup> One example of this kind of activity is the opportunity for children to contribute to and be heard at the annual conference of the National Parents Council - Primary.

<sup>61</sup> DIT's course in Early Childhood Care and Education and UCD's course in Nursery School Management, for example, provide opportunities for professionals working in these fields to explore their work from a children's rights perspective, including the matter of how children's voices might be heard.

at primary and post-primary level while the *Education Act, 1998* provides for the establishment of student councils in post-primary schools.<sup>62</sup>

### **National Children's Strategy**

The *National Children's Strategy* launched by the Government in November 2000 has created an unprecedented opportunity to build on such initiatives and thereby advance the implementation of Article 12 of the CRC. While it does not amount to a legislative provision, Goal One of the Strategy establishes the right of children and young people to be heard as a matter of national public policy. The structures created to support implementation of the Strategy – in particular the Cabinet Sub-Committee on Children, the National Children's Office and the National Children's Advisory Council – offer a framework for a cross-departmental and inter-sectoral approach to realising commitments outlined under Goal One. Taken together, Goal One and these structures can be seen to provide:

- A bedrock of legitimacy for hearing children's and young people's voices
- A means of ensuring that their right to be heard remains on the public policy agenda
- A foundation for the systematic development of opportunities for young voices to become structurally embedded in the democratic process.

### **Consulting Children and Young People in relation to the National Children's Strategy**

The new departure signified by Goal One was preceded by another: the consultation process with children and young people that took place in the context of the Strategy's preparation. While open to critical scrutiny,<sup>63</sup> this consultation was certainly groundbreaking. Three approaches were taken to elicit contributions from children and young people. The first involved an invitation from Mary Hanafin, Minister of State with responsibility for Children, to children and young people to contribute their observations and suggestions to the preparation of the Strategy. Issued through national newspapers, magazines, relevant journals, through all libraries and through both the schools' website Scoilnet and the Department of Health and Children website, this approach is the equivalent to that currently used to invite submissions from individual citizens in relation to legislative and other public policy initiatives. It can be viewed as an attempt to enable *every* child and young person in the country to have their say. 825 responses were received in the form of letters or emails to the Minister. The second represents a targeted and pragmatic approach to inclusion. Mary Hanafin visited ten schools selected by the Department of Education and Science as a representative cross-section of the different styles of schools in Ireland – primary schools, secondary schools, community schools, VEC schools, gaelscoileanna, special schools, Church of Ireland schools as well as schools in disadvantaged, urban and rural areas. The Minister met directly with approximately 600 children and young people (about sixty in each of the ten schools) through this targeted consultation, inviting them to respond to a number of general, open-ended questions. The third approach involved collaboration with the NGO sector. Organisations affiliated to the Children's Rights Alliance and the National Youth Council of Ireland were invited to facilitate a consultation with children and young people involved in their organisation or with whom they have contact through their work. Following a one-day preparatory workshop for interested organisations, ten NGOs subsequently

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<sup>62</sup> The National Youth Council of Ireland recently undertook a nationwide survey of second level students and principals, examining their views on student participation in school decision-making and student councils (NYCI, *Share It With The Rest Of The Class* (Dublin: NYCI, 2001)). The findings of this research formed the basis for a subsequent information pack to assist and support the development of school-based Student Councils (NYCI, *Youth Participation, Citizenship, Democracy: Learning the Skills of Active Democratic Participation* (Dublin: NYCI, 2001)).

<sup>63</sup> While acknowledging that this consultation process represented "an important preliminary step ... in encouraging children to participate in policy development", Hayes argues that the process can be characterised at best as "pre-participation" and "is better considered as 'tokenism'". See Hayes, N. (Forthcoming), 'Children's Rights: Participation of Children in Policy-making in Ireland', in Crimmens, D. (ed.), *Having their Say. Young People's Participation: European Perspectives* (University of Lincs. and Humberside).



facilitated consultations with children and young people.<sup>64</sup> 1,063 children and young people were enabled to make contributions via this route. In total, 2,488 children and young people in Ireland made submissions in a variety of formats to the *National Children's Strategy* team.<sup>65</sup>

### **Goal One: Objectives and Provisions**

As Hayes points out, it is "impossible to judge the degree to which results of the consultation process [with children and young people] impacted on the content of the National Children's Strategy."<sup>66</sup> However, the identification of hearing young voices as a 'National Goal' of the Strategy is in keeping with its status as a priority among those children and young people who took part. Reflecting the wording of Article 12 of the CRC, Goal One itself states: "Children will have a voice in matters which affect them and their views will be given due weight in accordance with their age and maturity."<sup>67</sup> Commitments under Goal One to ensuring that children can and will be heard in the diverse contexts that do or might affect them are underpinned by six key objectives:

- "To put in place new mechanisms in the public sector which achieve participation by children in matters which affect them"
- "To promote and support the development of a similar approach in the voluntary and private sectors"
- "To ensure that children are made aware of their rights and responsibilities"
- "To support children and organizations to make the most of the new opportunities to be provided"
- "To target additional resources and supports to enable marginalised children to participate equally"
- "To support research into and evaluation of new mechanisms to give children a voice".<sup>68</sup>

### **Implementing Goal One: First Steps**

Since the launch of the Strategy and under its auspices, first steps have been taken towards the implementation of Goal One. The first session of Dáil na nÓg took place at the Mansion House in Dublin on 5 September 2001. Attended by 250 children and young people from every county in Ireland, the event provided delegates with an opportunity to debate motions on 'Having a Voice', 'Play and Recreation' and 'Education'. This first session marked the birth of an annual event that will "act as a mechanism whereby children's concerns can be fed into the development of public policy making".<sup>69</sup> The national forum is to be complemented by local Comhairle na nÓg that will be established and managed by the County and City Development Boards. The first sessions of these local youth fora are expected to take place during 2002. That participants in them will elect delegates to the second national Dáil marks an advance on procedures for the first Dáil na nÓg where participants were selected by adults and for the most part comprised children and young people who had made submissions to the *National Children's Strategy*. Complementing these initiatives is, for example, the ISPC's Children's Consultation Unit, for which funding is being provided by the National Children's Office. The remit of the Unit is to provide support and training to professionals in the development of appropriate mechanisms for involving children and young people in public decision-making. Furthermore, Pavee Point has been commissioned to undertake a one-year research project to identify mechanisms for consulting with young

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<sup>64</sup> These organisations were: Barnardos, Border Counties Childcare Network, Catholic Youth Council, Development Education for Youth, Girls' Brigade, Irish Association of Young People in Care, ISPC, National Parents Council - Primary, Pavee Point and South West Inner City Network Limited.

<sup>65</sup> The findings of this consultation were compiled in a booklet for children and young people. Disseminated to participants, this booklet was published by the National Children's Strategy alongside the main report on and executive summary of the overall public consultation process that took place with regard to the Strategy. See, *National Children's Strategy, Report of the Public Consultation; Report of the Public Consultation - Executive Summary, and Report to Children on the Public Consultation* (Dublin: National Children's Strategy, 2000).

<sup>66</sup> Hayes (Forthcoming).

<sup>67</sup> Government of Ireland, *Our Children - Their Lives: The National Children's Strategy* (Dublin: Stationery Office), p. 30.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid*, p. 32.

<sup>69</sup> National Children's Office, *Dáil na nÓg 2001: Special Delegate Report* (unpublished), p. 2.

Travellers and facilitating their involvement in collective decision-making. A sub-group of the National Children's Advisory Council has a role to play in ensuring that a coordinated approach is taken to implementing the following measures identified in the Strategy as necessary for the implementation of Goal One:

- Researching and disseminating information on models of good practice appropriate to the Irish context
- Targeting resources to support the implementation of the provisions of Goal One
- Providing advice, guidance and training to professionals so as to enable them to operate and support mechanisms for the participation of children and young people
- Enabling children to avail of opportunities to make their voices and views heard in an informed and meaningful way
- Providing additional supports to marginalised children and young people in order to assist their involvement.<sup>70</sup>

### **Additional Developments**

There have been other developments of late that, while in keeping with Goal One of the Strategy, have taken place independent of the Strategy's structures. Among the most significant is the aforementioned *European White Paper on Youth*. Additional examples, relating to consultation with children and young people experiencing or at risk of poverty and social exclusion are summarised below. Before turning to these, two broad-based developments are worth noting. They betoken how consultation with children and young people at the level of public policy is in its infancy in Ireland and illustrate that important first steps are being taken to weave children's and young people's voices into the fabric of public policy development. The first development is the auditing of current levels and modes of children's and young people's involvement in decision-making processes affecting them. Two audits merit a particular mention: the audit undertaken in the context of the National Youth Work Development Plan (NYWDP) and NYCI's audit for the Carnegie Young People Initiative. Prepared by the National Youth Work Advisory Committee (NYWAC), the NYWDP sets out a framework for the development of youth work in Ireland over the next five years. The Children's Research Centre at Trinity College undertook an extensive piece of research for the NYWAC, the key results of which were outlined at a Consultative Conference in February 2001. They suggest mixed levels of young people's participation in decision-making in the area of youth work provision. One indicator is that approximately one-third of youth organisations surveyed and one-fifth of community-based youth projects surveyed had representation of young people on their governing bodies. It is expected that the National Youth Work Development Plan will include recommendations encouraging the development of youth participation structures and mechanisms within the youth work sector. These include the further development of 'youth led' youth organisations and resources to support optimum youth participation within new and existing areas of youth work. The mapping study undertaken by O'Leary for NYCI and the Carnegie Young People Initiative focused on the involvement of young people aged 15-25 years in public decision-making. Amongst the key statistical and attitudinal findings arising from information provided by the 104 responding organisations were:

- 50% worked with young people who are socially or educationally disadvantaged.<sup>71</sup>
- 70% directly involved young people in decision-making.<sup>72</sup>
- 51% involved young people as part of their everyday work.<sup>73</sup>
- Over half (for the most part, youth and community development organisations) involve young people at an operational level, but with limited scope for their participation in an advisory capacity.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Government of Ireland (2000), p. 36.

<sup>71</sup> O'Leary (2001), p. 3.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid, p. 3.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid, p. 3.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid, p. 3 and p. 31.

- Almost 60% (in the main, youth and community development organisations) indicated that young people were involved in decision-making outside the initiative.<sup>75</sup>
- Young people “have few opportunities to participate in decision making on external issues”, which suggests a tendency of existing initiatives to be “inward looking and not ‘political’ in nature”.<sup>76</sup>
- “There are no guidelines in place to ensure that young people’s participation in local initiatives will impact on external policy or for initiatives to ensure that young people are encouraged and supported in participating in external decision making”.<sup>77</sup>
- 91% of respondents felt that the views of young people had made an impact on their organisation.<sup>78</sup>
- However, only 40% had evaluated the impact of young people on decision-making<sup>79</sup> while some organisations articulated a belief that “there was a limit to the level of decision making that young people should be involved in, and that limit should be set by adults who work with them”.<sup>80</sup>

To these findings can be added data arising from a smaller survey of relevant statutory bodies and NGOs at national and local level undertaken as part of this research study. Of the 59 respondents:<sup>81</sup>

- 69% of statutory organisations and 85% of NGOs consult with children and young people
- 52% of respondents consult with children and young people experiencing or at risk of poverty or other forms of social exclusion
- 45% consult with young Travellers
- 32% consult with children and young people with disabilities
- 28% consult with children and young people out of home
- 40% consult with children and young people with literacy difficulties
- 25% consult with children and young people from cultural/ethnic minorities
- With regard to the levels of decision-making in relation to which children and young people are consulted, one key finding in the context of this study is that 32% of NGOs and 39% of statutory bodies *never* consult with children and young people at a political level, i.e. in relation to policy-making
- On foot of this finding, it is significant that 100% of respondents stated that children and young people *should* be consulted in relation to decision-making and policy-making processes affecting them. 83% of respondents identified children’s right to be consulted as a “very significant” reason for doing so, making it the principal “very significant” reason.

In light of such findings, the second development worth noting is initial steps to *promote* the creation of meaningful and sustainable opportunities for children and young people to be heard in relation to policy developments affecting them. The Office of Ombudsman for Children provided for in the Strategy and legislated for in the *Ombudsman for Children Act, 2002* will have the promotion of children’s rights, including children’s right to be heard, as part of its remit. An existing example from within the statutory sector is a recent report on the creation of an adolescent-friendly health service prepared by Best Health for Children and published by the National Conjoint Child Health Committee. Preparation of the report involved young people. However, what is particularly significant in the current context is that the recommendation to provide for the meaningful and systematic involvement of young people in the area of health is not reduced to a quasi-perfunctory bullet point. The report not only makes the case for involving young people, but provides Health Boards with guidelines for consulting young people as well as with four case studies, each representing a different

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid, p. 35.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid, p. 59.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid, p. 59.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid, p. 3.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid, p. 3.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid, p. 60.

<sup>81</sup> This number represents a final response rate of 48%. While this response level is adequate for a postal questionnaire, the fact that the questionnaire was sent to a stratified sample of organisations and that 52% of those to whom it was sent did not respond means that it cannot be assumed that the findings are representative of what is happening in the round.

level of involvement of young people and illustrating opportunities for young people to be involved in the areas of health policy, promotion, service creation and provision.<sup>82</sup>

### 1.4.3. Consulting Children and Young People experiencing Poverty and Social Exclusion

To the extent that the findings presented above represent responses from 59 organisations, it cannot be assumed that they are representative of what is happening in the round in Ireland. However, on the basis of this data and other elements of the research for this study, it would appear that, as in other countries, children and young people experiencing poverty and social exclusion are less likely to be involved in existing consultative fora. That an awareness of this deficit exists can be welcomed as a necessary first step towards redressing it. In addition, efforts have been made to consult children and young people in the context of a variety of public policy agendas relating to poverty and social exclusion. Notable examples are:

- *My Name's Not Down*, a video developed as part of young people's contribution to a conference on guidance, 'Future Directions – Guidance as a Force for Social Inclusion'. Funded by the EU Employment Initiative Youthstart and the Department of Education and Science, the conference aimed to identify ways of improving guidance provision for young people at risk of social exclusion. In the video, ten young early school leavers from different parts of Ireland speak frankly and critically of their experience of guidance prior to leaving school and evaluate the impact of both these experiences and their subsequent involvement in Youthstart initiatives on their sense of self-worth and future employment prospects.<sup>83</sup>
- In 1999, the Eastern Health Board established a Forum on Youth Homelessness to draw up a plan of action to address existing inadequacies within service provision and identify ways in which services could be rendered more effective and responsive to the needs of young people out of home. Fifteen young people (fourteen of whom were under 18 years) who were or had been out of home were consulted over a four-month period for their views on existing service provision. Several met with a group of Forum members while others represented their situation through artwork and prepared a video that was subsequently viewed by all Forum members. The findings of this consultation were included in the report subsequently prepared by the Forum on Youth Homelessness.<sup>84</sup> Findings and recommendations of the Forum have since been incorporated into the *Youth Homelessness Strategy* (2001).
- Further to the YOUTHREACH 2000 consultation and agreement of the Department of Education and Science to proposals by the national co-ordinators of YOUTHREACH to establish a *Quality Framework Initiative* for YOUTHREACH, a consultation on the *Initiative* involving staff and trainees of YOUTHREACH centres was initiated in May 2001. Both staff and trainees were invited to respond to the Initiative, with staff being provided with recommendations on how to engage trainees and suggestions about questions to ask. These centre-based consultations with young trainees were accompanied by nine regional consultations, held during October/November 2001. Each centre could nominate two staff members and two trainees to attend these regional consultation meetings. The consultations themselves saw trainees being consulted on the same day and at the same venue, but separate from YOUTHREACH staff and management. Lasting three hours, these meetings involved group discussion and group work, with members of the Calipo Theatre

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<sup>82</sup> Denyer, S. et al, *Get Connected: Developing an Adolescent Friendly Health Service* (Dublin: National Conjoint Committee on Health, 2001).

<sup>83</sup> Youthstart, et al, *My Name's Not Down* (Dublin: Youthstart/DES, n.d.).

<sup>84</sup> Northern Area Health Board (2000).

Company facilitating the sessions. A total of 130 trainees participated in these meetings.<sup>85</sup>

- In 2001/2002, the National Economic and Social Forum established a project team to examine the issue of early school leaving and its impact on social and economic disadvantage. As part of this process, the NESF secretariat undertook a consultation process with a group of early school leavers with a view to establishing their reasons for leaving school. Many of their views have fed into the policy recommendations made to government in relation to the problem of class size, streaming and curriculum expansion. Furthermore, the NESF report on early school leavers advocates the importance of student participation in school-related decision-making and its facilitation through structures such as student councils.
- The 2001 annual report of the Irish Social Services Inspectorate (ISSI) details advances with regard to consultation with children and young people in residential care. Evidence arising from inspections suggests that:
  - Centres are more aware of children's rights and understand the importance of listening to children and young people
  - One third of centres are developing statements on children's rights and one board has fully included the views of children and young people in its statement, an action commended by the ISSI
  - Children and young people are being consulted on daily life in the centre, decisions relating to their care, plans for their future care as well as centres' statutory reviews of their care plans
  - Key-workers are preparing children and young people for reviews
  - Guidelines on consultation are required to further substantiate the ISSI's view that "the principle and practice of consultation with children [is] essential to good child care practice".<sup>86</sup>
- Children and young people are currently being trained to participate on the Local Committees established as part of the Home, School, Community Liaison scheme launched in 1990 by the then Department of Education.<sup>87</sup> In a small number of cases children and young people are already participating on these Committees, one example being the Local Education Committee for Waterford Inner City.<sup>88</sup>
- To coincide with Traveller Focus Week 2002, Citizen Traveller launched a *Citizen Traveller Youth Charter*, a pre-election message to government that had been prepared by young Travellers and was accompanied by a media briefing in March 2002. A number of young Travellers addressed the briefing, reiterating their aspirations around issues addressed in the Charter – accommodation, education and training, discrimination, drugs, and Traveller youth services.<sup>89</sup>

Given such initiatives and the commitment in the *National Children's Strategy* to facilitate an inclusive approach to the implementation of Goal One, one question that arises is: Might consultation with children and young people experiencing poverty and social exclusion be a function of social inclusion? This question was put to ten practitioners and policy-makers interviewed for the purposes of this study. While their responses are presented in Chapter Four, it is worth noting at this stage that nine of the ten interviewees felt that consultation with these groups might be a function of social inclusion both at a micro level (through being a positive and enabling experience for the individual children and young people concerned)

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<sup>85</sup> Unpublished document received from the National Co-ordinator for YOUTHREACH.

<sup>86</sup> Irish Social Services Inspectorate (ISSI), *Irish Social Service Inspectorate Annual Report 2001* (Dublin: ISSI, 2001), p. 37.

<sup>87</sup> Conaty, C., 'The Home, School, Community Liaison scheme', in *Institute of Guidance Counsellors Journal*, Vol. 24 (Spring, 2000), pp. 39-51.

<sup>88</sup> Casey, T., *Waterford Inner City Local Education Committee: Annual Review May 2000 – February 2001* (unpublished paper) and *Waterford Inner City Local Education Committee – Student Involvement* (unpublished paper).

<sup>89</sup> Citizen Traveller, *Youth Charter* (March 2002).

and/or at a macro level (through contributing to the creation of more effective public policies to tackle child poverty and social exclusion). The following caveat ought to be added, however, due to the lack of evidence-based research into this question: if done inappropriately, consultation with socially excluded children and young people could prove counterproductive on both counts. A negative experience of consultation might serve to exacerbate any existing sense of marginalisation felt by these children and young people. Furthermore, if effective means are not found to enable these and other children and young people to make meaningful contributions to public policy developments affecting them, it is likely that, despite the Strategy's provisions, first-hand experience will render policy-makers, practitioners and others less rather than more convinced of the need to hear young voices at this level of decision-making and hence reluctant to facilitate their future involvement.

While briefly made, these points are suggestive of the multifaceted challenge facing all those with a remit in relation to Goal One to ensure that meaningful and inclusive opportunities are created for all children and young people to contribute to public policy development at national and local level. That this public policy issue is in its infancy in Ireland can be seen, however, as an opportunity since it provides for an exploratory approach to getting it real and getting it right. Initial food for thought on the forms this approach might or might not take is provided by the four case studies presented below. And with a view to prompting reflection on where getting it real and right might take us, we conclude this opening chapter by presenting policy-makers' and practitioners' visions of what children and young people having a voice ought to mean in 2010 – the year in which it is intended that the *National Children's Strategy's* goals and commitments will have been implemented.

## **1.5. CASE STUDIES**

The four case studies presented below have been selected as examples of consultation with children and young people in relation to public policy developments affecting them and/or with children and young people experiencing or at risk of poverty and social exclusion. With the exception of the fourth case study, all of the case studies are illustrative of the involvement of children and young people in Ireland in consultative processes affecting them.

### **Case Study 1: The *European White Paper on Youth***

#### **Initiation of the White Paper**

On 23 November 1999, Viviane Reding, the Commissioner for Education and Culture, who is also responsible for youth affairs, announced that the European Commission was to draw up a White Paper on youth policies in the EU. This initiative was widely welcomed by the member states and the green light was given to the European Commission to begin a broad consultative process during 2000. In the EU context, White Papers are documents containing proposals for community action in specific areas. They provide very detailed proposals for debate. Initially, they have no legal implications. However, if favourably received by the European Council of Ministers, a White Paper may become an action programme for the EU. Since 1985, nineteen White Papers have been published on a very wide range of topics, such as employment, transport and governance.

#### **The Consultation Process**

The Commission decided it would be important to involve the different stakeholders in this policy area in the drafting of this document. It embarked on a long process of consultation with Governmental authorities, youth organisations, experts and researchers. A process of national consultations began in May 2000. Between then and August 2000 thousands of young people aged between 15 and 25 years throughout the EU were invited to submit their opinions and recommendations to the Commission and national governments. During this

consultation process a range of youth-related topics were addressed under the following headings:

- Civil Society
- Work and the Economy
- Welfare
- Autonomy
- The European Dimension.

### **Dublin Conference**

In Ireland, a national youth conference was held in Dublin on 1 July 2000. Entitled 'Youth Future Conference: Europe and You', the conference involved over 80 young people from all over Ireland. The conference was hosted by the Youth Affairs Section of the Department of Education and Science, with assistance from the National Youth Council of Ireland (NYCI). Participants were recruited following an extensive call for applications in schools, colleges, youth organisations, community organisations and other bodies. Participants were selected from the 294 applications received in a manner that would ensure a wide spread of young people from all over Ireland and from different social backgrounds and age groups. The conference was a success, with participants investing tremendous energy in analysing the situation for young people in Ireland today and in making recommendations for change. A report was prepared, published and fed into deliberations at EU level.

### **Paris Conference**

In October 2000, the process of national consultations with young people concluded with a European conference held in Paris under the French presidency of the EU. Two of the young people involved in the Dublin conference, along with a representative from NYCI, contributed to the preparations for this conference, including attendance at two preparatory meetings in Paris and Brussels. Twenty young people attended the main Paris Conference, accompanied by officials of the Department of Education and Science and NYCI representatives. In total, 450 delegates from more than thirty European countries debated a range of issues under the following headings:

- Participation
- Employment and Work
- Occupational Training and Social Integration
- Education
- Welfare, Autonomy and Culture.

### **Additional Consultations**

After the meeting in Paris, the Economic and Social Committee (ESC) and the European Parliament held a series of hearings with NGOs, young people and other social actors in order to allow for more in-depth preparation of the White Paper. NYCI prepared a submission to the Commission that set out its views and those of its member organisations on the content of the White Paper. Entitled *Putting Youth at the Centre of Europe*, this document was submitted in January 2001. NYCI had a subsequent meeting with the Commission in Dublin to outline its proposals and views.

From 1 January to 30 June 2001, the Swedish Youth Council (LSU) used the Swedish presidency of the EU to work intensively to inject new impetus into the consultation process relating to the drafting of the *EU White Paper on Youth*. At a meeting on 16 and 17 March 2001 in Umea, the Swedish presidency debated issues relating to the condition of youth in Europe and subsequently released a report that was delivered to the Commissioner for Education, Youth and Culture, Viviane Reding. Two young people from Ireland who had taken part in the earlier consultations also attended this meeting.

## **Publication and Response**

In November 2001, the White Paper was published by the EU Commission under the title *A New Impetus for European Youth*. NYCI analysed this document with reference to its earlier submission and the consultation process that had been carried out. A special meeting was held with the group of Irish young people who had been involved in the consultation process in Dublin and Paris and the key issues were discussed at NYCI's Annual Assembly in Mullingar on 24 and 25 November 2001. NYCI drew up and circulated an Initial Response to the White Paper entitled *A Missed Opportunity to Put Youth at the Centre of Europe*. This document incorporated the views of the young people involved in the consultative conference in Paris. This response was delivered by an Irish delegation – that included three of the Paris Group of young people – to an EU meeting in Ghent on 26 and 28 November 2001.

The response expressed deep disappointment with the publication of the *EU White Paper on Youth*. It argued that its content represented a missed opportunity to put young people at the centre of Europe. At a time when many Irish young people appear to be disillusioned and disinterested in European issues, it was held that the White Paper should and could have been one of the most important developments emanating from Europe. The Irish delegation urged all those involved in the production of the White Paper to critically review this work. The Irish delegation was the only delegation which had prepared a written response to the White Paper.

The Spanish presidency of the EU intends to draw up an Action Plan that will allow NYCI and others to re-structure the content of this White Paper. At a European Youth Gathering in Murcia from 8 to 12 March 2002, work began on the development of this Action Plan.

## **Case Study 2: Consultation on the *National Youth Work Development Plan***

### **Background**

The National Youth Work Advisory Committee (NYWAC) was established in June 1997 following the passing of the *Youth Work Act, 1997*. Following some exploratory work by the Committee, the Minister for Youth, Mr. Willie O'Dea TD, asked the Committee to prepare a comprehensive five-year strategic plan for the development of youth work in the Republic of Ireland. This work was subsequently committed to in the *Programme for Prosperity and Fairness*.

It was agreed by the NYWAC that there was an urgent need for a planned and systematic approach to the delivery of youth work given the rapid and largely uncoordinated development of services for young people, funded from various sources. It was agreed that a fundamental research project was required to underpin the aims of the Plan. The specific objectives of this research were:

- To undertake a comprehensive review of the current youth work provision which included the broader social context, but which focused on youth work
- In consultation with the youth sector, to formulate a 'vision' for the sector and develop a set of strategic objectives and a development plan to achieve these objectives over a five-year period.

### **Research and Consultation Process**

The research and consultation process that resulted in the National Youth Work Development Plan (2000-2006) took place over a twelve-month period between March 2000 and February 2001. The research was undertaken by TCD's Children's Research Centre. The methodology for the research and consultation process involved a multi-layered research approach:



- Documentary research
- Survey of youth involvement
- Survey of key informants
- Consultative process.

With respect to the involvement of children and young people in the research and consultation process, certain points ought to be highlighted:

- As regards the survey of youth involvement, three out of the four surveys carried out were with adults:
  - A survey of all youth organisations in receipt of funding from the Department of Education and Science and/or members of the NYCI;
  - A survey of all community-based projects funded under the Special Youth Projects Grant Scheme and the Services Project of the Young People's Facilities and Services Fund;
  - A survey of a representative sample of local youth groups.
 The remaining questionnaire surveyed young people in selected schools.
- As regards the survey of key informants, which involved the use of semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions, two out of the eight interview processes were with adults. The purpose of the interviews was to explore with those involved in both policy and practice issues affecting the development of youth work. A total of 25 individuals were interviewed as part of the semi-structured interview process including: heads of all major youth work organizations, members of NYWAC, Department officials, representatives from other key stake-holders, and youth nominees from various youth work organisations. Focus groups were conducted with service providers and with young people.

### **Consultative Conference**

Preliminary research results were presented at a Consultative Conference to key individuals involved in shaping and/or the future delivery of services for young people. The conference involved over 150 delegates and was held over a two-day period in Dublin Castle. This consultation began the process of refining policy and practice recommendations that led to the identification of priorities for the *National Youth Work Development Plan*.

### **Analysis of the Consultation Process for the NYWDP**

The consultative process for the National Youth Work Development Plan is a good example of how an extensive and far-reaching consultative process can fail to adequately consult with the end-user: children and young people.

As noted from the methodology, the majority of the consultation process engaged with adults – service-providers, policy-makers, Department officials, senior volunteers, and so on. While their experiences and knowledge are invaluable to the process of developing a strategic plan for youth work, the experiences of children and young people who are involved in youth work need to be given due consideration.

Four focus groups with children and young people were held to explore the benefits of their involvement in youth work as well as exploring reasons for non-involvement in the youth service. The four focus groups involved children and young people from rural as well as urban areas. However, there is little evidence to suggest:

- Which age groups were interviewed in the process
- Whether the views of children and young people experiencing poverty or other forms of social exclusion – considered to be one of the most important target groups for youth work provision – were consulted
- Whether the views of children and young people are adequately reflected in the *National Youth Work Development Plan* itself.

The consultative process for the NYWDP clearly highlights the structural dilemmas facing policy-makers and practitioners who work with or for children and young people. The consultative process for the Plan was adult-led, adult-centred and adult-friendly despite the fact that the NYWDP for 2000-2006 will directly impact on the social and personal development of children and young people at a national, regional and local level. While consultation for the NYWDP was far-reaching, it highlighted the fact that consultation with children and young people can be tokenistic.

As O'Leary notes, however, even though the consultative process for the NYWDP was primarily adult-led "it is likely that the National Youth Work Development Plan will include significant recommendations encouraging the development of youth participation structures and mechanisms in the youth work sector, including the further development of 'youth led' organisations and resources to support optimum youth participation within existing and new forms of youth work."<sup>90</sup>

### **Case Study 3: Consulting Young People in Care on the *National Children's Strategy***

*Written by Catherine Carty, National Co-ordinator of the Irish Association of Young People in Care, this case study first appeared as an article in Barnardos' magazine 'Childlinks' (Spring, 2001). It is being reproduced here with kind permission of the author and the editor of 'Childlinks'.*

#### **Background**

The Irish Association of Young People in Care (IAYPIC) was established in January 2000. It receives its funding from the Department of Health and Children and has Barnardos as its 'over-seeing' body. The purpose and function of the IAYPIC is to provide an information service to all children and young people in the care of the Health Boards, informing them of their rights while in care. In addition, it aims to empower children and young people to become involved in decisions that affect their future, and facilitate that involvement both at a local micro level and at a national macro policy level. It is also envisaged that once this Association becomes established nationwide it will comment on practice and policy issues pertaining to young people in care. In essence this Association aims to be the voice of children and young people in care.

#### **IAYPIC Consultation with Young People in Care on the *National Children's Strategy***

In February 2000, IAYPIC was made aware of the consultation process for the *National Children's Strategy* and was invited to take part. At this point, while there was a Management/Steering Committee in place, there were no links with children or young people in care. However, it was felt to be of critical importance to be part of this consultation process and therefore IAYPIC quickly made links with residential centres in order to invite young people in care to become involved. While trying to be as inclusive as possible within the imposed time limits, we decided to hold a one-day consultation in Athlone, which geographically would facilitate the majority of people travelling from all corners. The following is an account of that consultation day.

We contacted 15 residential centres and 4 agencies which had children in foster care in an effort to encourage young people to travel to Athlone for the consultation day. We relied very heavily upon the residential workers and the foster parents to facilitate travel of the young people from their respective areas to the meeting place. 13 young people arrived: 7 girls and 6 boys. 12 of the young people lived in residential care and 1 child in foster care. The young people ranged in age from 13 to 19 years with the majority being 15 years old. A further 3 young people who were unable to attend sent written submissions instead.

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<sup>90</sup> O'Leary (2001), p. 11.

The *National Children's Strategy* had invited us to look at our issues in the context of a question: "Is Ireland a good place to grow up in? What is good about it?" They also wanted to know, "What are the issues facing young people over the next 10 years?" We anticipated, in planning the day, that the majority of young people would never have experienced a discussion day such as this and it was therefore imperative that it was paced at their speed and that it was going to be provocative enough to maintain their interest. While 4 people were involved in the planning of the day – 2 members of the Management Committee and 2 young people with care experience – it was largely the young people who facilitated the day with the support of the other 2 people through activities and 'small-group' discussion. We planned our day around facilitating the young people to discuss and answer this question. The day was divided into sections where we asked the young people to discuss 'spin-off' questions from the primary question. The 'spin-off' questions we decided upon were:

1. "What are the things facing you in the next 10 years?"
2. "What's good about being in care? What's not good about being in care?"
3. "What would you change?"

There followed a perceptive and informed discussion which could have carried on for far longer than the one day we had planned. The following is a synopsis of the day's discussions.

### **What Young People in Care said**

With regard to the issues facing the young people over the next 10 years, they talked about the pressure of having to face school exams and moving out of care at the same time. They spoke of the terror of starting college and being on their own in a flat – the terror of being alone and having no one to go home to. The terror of feeling no one will want them. They talked of the stigma of being in care and of having to deal with how others label them on the basis of their care experience. They spoke about having to cope with changes in their lives without the friends they had before coming into care and of how, sometimes, their friends did not want to be seen with them anymore. They talked of having to deal with the constant changing of staff and social workers and of having to live with a lack of privacy about their lives. They spoke about not being able to have a pet and of trying to cope with not having enough access to their families.

The discussion then moved on to positive issues in relation to life in care, of which there were many and varied. They spoke about the opportunities for education and sport and how, often, they would not have had access to those opportunities had they remained at home. They talked about having better choices in care. They went on to speak about people they met in care and how they made good friends with some people. They spoke about people being there to care for them but that sometimes young people have a problem with that and don't want the staff to care for them. They talked about having their own room for the first time when they came into care and finished this particular part of their discussion with an analysis of catering levels within their care experience.

The young people stayed in their small groups and went on to discuss the negative aspects of being in care. This discussion was more lengthy than the previous one, and had a depth of commonality about it. The concept that arose most throughout the discussion, in various and different guises, was that of not 'having a say' and not being heard. This arose in relation to protestations about pocket money, friends, freedom, sanctions, phone calls, pets ... in fact, practically every facet of their lives and they discussed these with a tangible sense of disenchantment with their lives.

In the next section we asked them to look at what they would, if they could, change about their care experience. They became more adventurous as this exercise progressed and came up with many practical and far-reaching suggestions for what they would change. They suggested that they should be able to attend meetings which concern them, that they should be able to see their families more often or less often, if that was what they wished. They felt

that they should be able to have a pet if they wanted one and suggested the children's home should look like a normal house in a normal housing estate. They thought that the name of the home shouldn't be printed on the side of the mini-bus "because it's way too embarrassing". They suggested that children in care should have a more permanent social worker because they keep leaving all the time. They suggested that every young person in care should have their own room and that they should be able to decorate it whatever way they wanted.

We then carried out an exercise wherein the young people were given the prop of a 'magic wand' and asked to identify one thing they would change if reality were not an issue and they instead had the powers of sorcery. They made forthright suggestions with an eruditeness that belied their years.<sup>91</sup>

### **Analysis**

This was the first occasion, for all of these young people, on which they had debated the issues of being in care with other young people. They said they would have had meetings in their residential care centre but they would be meetings regarding specific in-house issues. They were never asked heretofore, by policy-makers, to discuss the wider issues of care or, more importantly, what care has been like for them. This to date has been the failure of successive policy-makers. These young people demonstrated maturity, insight and introspection coupled with an ability to look beyond themselves when making suggestions as to what might improve the care experience for other children and young people.

This Department should be congratulated for finally giving these young people in care a voice. The young people used their opportunity judiciously and magnanimously. They debated their issues frankly and without apology and made suggestions for change based on their experience. The Irish Association of Young People in Care is richer for its experience of this young people's consultation day.

## **Case Study 4: *Bread is Free* – Consulting Children and Young People about Poverty**

*The text of this case study comprises material that has been selected and adapted from Caroline Willow's report on the 'Bread is Free' consultation.*

### **Background**

Between February and May 2001, the Children's Rights Alliance for England (CRAE) and Save the Children implemented a consultation with 106 children and young people living in communities in England that are experiencing high levels of poverty and social deprivation.

Following the announcement of the Children's Fund in the UK in 2000, the CRAE and Save the Children began to explore how they might forge links between those working in the anti-poverty field and children and young people. Aware that children's and young people's views on and experiences of child poverty were largely unrecorded and that national debates on child poverty continued to be adult-led, CRAE and Save the Children embarked on the project with a view to enabling children and young people experiencing poverty to contribute to a new Government programme. In addition, the findings of the consultation were intended to "further convince practitioners and policy makers of the necessity of seeking information and advice from children and young people when developing and improving local services as well as in the development and implementation of national programmes and public policy."<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> The suggestions arising from this activity are reproduced in the *Report of the Public Consultation - National Children's Strategy*. See National Children's Strategy (2000), p. 47.

<sup>92</sup> Willow (2001), p. 74.

### **Identifying, contacting and selecting Participants**

In seeking to involve children and young people experiencing poverty in this consultation, the project coordinators did not want to label or further stigmatise the individuals concerned. Therefore, while they visited areas experiencing high levels of socio-economic deprivation, they did not ask the children and young people any direct questions about their personal circumstances. It was also decided to afford the children and young people opportunities to be heard in groups rather than one-to-one settings. It was felt that this would help them to feel more at ease and afford them the choice of responding to the questions asked of them. It was also intended that the children and young people should be enabled to discuss issues amongst themselves and that each child/young person should be encouraged to develop their own views and ideas while supplementing those of other participants.

The researchers visited younger children in primary schools and in day care settings located in areas of deprivation and socio-economic disadvantage. Initial contact was made with head teachers or project managers to explain the purpose of the project and to request that letters be sent to parents of children in receipt of free school meals. Upon receipt of parental consent, the researchers met with the children and told them about the project, emphasising that they did not have to take part and, if they chose to participate, that they could stop the discussion at any time. Older participants were contacted through Save the Children's development teams, whereby the researchers asked to be put in contact with young people living in areas of high socio-economic deprivation.

The 106 children and young people consulted were aged between 5 and 16 years. Although some teenagers took part, the project targeted pre-teens: 59 participants were under 8 years and only 10 participants were over 14 years. In addition:

- 39% of participants were from minority ethnic backgrounds
- 53% of participants lived with two parents and at least one sibling
- 24% of participants lived in families of two adults and between four and six children
- 16 % of participants live with a lone parent and most of these had siblings living with them too
- 2 children lived with grandparents.<sup>93</sup>

### **Methodologies**

Two different methodologies were used to accommodate the ages and preferences of the children and young people who took part.

With the children under eight years of age, the researchers used a storybook approach involving a character called Splodge.<sup>94</sup> At the end of the session, young children were given a Splodge hand puppet to play with and a camera was provided so that all participants could have their photograph taken holding Splodge.

Older participants were consulted through structured discussion groups that lasted between one and three hours. Prior to these discussions, each group played a board game about family income and expenditure. At the end of the discussion groups, participants were provided with a range of art materials so that they might express their views in more creative ways. However, most of the young people preferred to continue with the group discussions.

Refreshments were freely available to participants in each session and at the end of their session, participants were given a five-pound gift voucher as a token of thanks.

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<sup>93</sup> Willow (2001), pp. 75-76.

<sup>94</sup> This method was first used by the National Children's Bureau and Save the Children in the UK to consult young people about physical punishment. See Willow, C. and Hyder T., *It Hurts You Inside: Children talking about Smacking* (London: National Children's Bureau, 1998). As noted earlier in this chapter, Splodge has more recently been used by Save the Children in Northern Ireland to enable younger children to contribute to the Office of Law Reform's Consultation with Young People on Physical Punishment in the Home.

## Themes

Through the character of Splodge, the younger children were asked questions about what it is like not to have enough money. With the young people, the researchers aimed to elicit their views on the following themes:

- Definitions of poverty
- Impact of poverty on children's and young people's lives
- Impact of childhood poverty on adults
- Improving the lives of children and young people living in poverty
- Eliminating child poverty.

In addition, the young people were invited to share any additional thoughts they might have on what prevents children and young people from having good chances in life and reaching their potential.<sup>95</sup>

The children and young people addressed a broad range of issues that included:

- Being left out of childhood
- Education
- Health
- Crime
- Relationships with parents
- Experiences of sadness and shame
- Hopes and dreams
- Making children's and young people's lives better
- Ending child poverty.

## Feedback

Within two months of their respective sessions, participating children and young people were sent a personalised letter and a summary leaflet of the main messages that had been generated through the process. They were also invited to become involved in the CRAE's and Save the Children's anti-poverty development work, including the launch of the report of this consultation process, *Bread is Free*. Participants also received copies of this report.

## Evaluation

In evaluating the consultation, the researchers made the following observations:

- Children and young people with disabilities were under-represented in the project
- The attempt to cover such a wide range of issues meant that no one aspect could be addressed in depth
- The mixed composition of the groups meant that ethnic and gender differences may have been masked
- The observations and experiences of children and young people living in rural communities were barely covered
- While time and resource constraints precluded it, it would have been preferable to bring together participants from the young people's groups to discuss and agree recommendations arising from the consultations.

## 1.6. Sighting 2010: What Policy-Makers and Practitioners Envision

Speaking from and to the diverse contexts in which they work, the ten policy-makers and practitioners interviewed for this study had different expectations of and aspirations for what hearing young voices ought to mean by 2010. However, what unites these visions is a view that an onward and upward road ought to lie ahead.

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<sup>95</sup> For more information, see Willow (2001), pp. 80-81.

### **A Health Service that Children and Young People see as their Health Service**

"At Health Board level, the structures are there, ... but it's all adult-focused ... [Young people] don't see the Health Board as their Health Board ... They need to see it as belonging to them ... [I'd like to see] that you would have local structure ... And [they might] feed into regional level ... and a national level. ... And a structure that feeds back ... to young people. A two-way street. That young people begin to see the Health Board as being a service for them and that they have a say in how it operates." – *Health Board practitioner*

### **Mechanisms that enable Children and Young People out of Home to be heard**

"They [young people out of home] weren't very involved in the development of the [National Children's] Strategy ... There were efforts ... made to get them on board, but the structures, ... the philosophy wasn't there to bring them ... into it ... [B]y the end of the decade, [I'd like to see] that systems would be in place whereby it's easier to access their opinions and have them participate ... I didn't feel comfortable bringing some of our young people to Dáil na nÓg the last time ... To me, a huge piece would be that they could go to something like that, feel worthwhile, feel that they ... had an opportunity to be listened to ... [I]t will take them time ... to be able to be vocal about what they think and what way they want things to be. And I suppose it's about opening up those possibilities ... for them" – *Practitioner working with young people out of home*

### **Young Travellers are included and are heard**

"For me, ... it's that young Travellers get ... recognition of their identity and are heard ... So they can feel that they're listened to and ... responded to ... [That] their identity is validated for them ... A lot of it's connected to ... the issue of identity, ... that sense of belonging ... [to] the community as a whole as well as being part of ... [the] Traveller community. ... That the process of consultation is inclusive ... and is seen as a process that works" – *Pavee Point representative*

### **Children and Young People are engaged in Public Policy Debate**

"That they [children and young people] are engaged in public policy debate at an appropriate level ... The changed system to ... take their views on board. ... [To] ensure that you have all the strands of society ... in the consultation process ... That would be the important thing" – *Public policy-maker at national level*

### **Children and Young People are seen and heard as Participants in Public Policy**

"At the local level ... I'd like there to be ... a local children's forum ... that ties into everything that's going on ... I'd like that it's not just going to be that in ten years time people are still just holding a forum once a year to talk to children ... That children ... are more involved ... If you've got a board of management, that there are children on it ... So that we've moved it beyond simply asking them for their opinions ... to allow them to participate in the decision-making process. Which is the ultimate goal. ... At national level ... I'd like to see ... Dáil na nÓg becoming a major focus for young people ... that it's earned ... the respect that gets them listened to ... I tie it ... back to the vision of what children's rights means: children as citizens. ... Some concrete meaning can be given to it." – *Public policy-maker at national level*

### **Consensus that Children and Young People should be heard as a Matter of Course**

"I'd like to think that we were all singing off the same hymn sheet in ten years time. I'd like to think that it was policy that before any sort of decision [affecting them is taken,] ... children would have a say." – *Children's consultation officer*

### **Children and Young People are Players**

"I would like to see them consulted a lot more ... And being seen ... [not just] as recipients of services, [but] as ... players. At their own level, ... but having a real contribution to make to society. And that children would feel ... too that ... they'd be listened to ... If you ask me what I'd like to see in 2010, it's the Strategy implemented. I think it's a good Strategy ... If any of it got implemented toward the greater goal of young people being taken seriously and having a real input, that'd be something" – *Representative of the voluntary youth sector*

### **Goal One of the National Children's Strategy is implemented**

"We're only in our second year into this [the National Children's Strategy] ... I think that if in ten years we could reach a point where ... some of that [Goal One] has taken place, I would think 'That's great' ... It will take a lot of commitment ... on the part of those who are involved" – *Practitioner working with children and young people with physical disabilities*

### **Young Voices are inserted into the Policy-Making Process in a seamless Way**

"The vision would be for children and young people to have an appropriate mechanism to contribute on issues which are of relevance to them ... Taking a very pragmatic view ... it is about trying to insert that voice within the policy-making dynamics in a ... seamless way. ... It seems to me ... the issue is the locus of development of this ... I think it is probably the Children's Office, which is ... working with the various sectors to develop these good practices" – *Public policy-maker at national level*

### **Children's Fora are vibrant and effective**

"What it should mean by then is that the children's fora should be up, running, vibrant. That children from all different backgrounds should be interacting. That what is being said at those fora is being taken on board by area committees, strategic policy committees, by different agencies. And that you can very clearly see in programmes, plans, policies ... what the children said at the forum or at consultation meetings ... I don't think programmes for children in 2010 should be designed by talking to youth workers. They should be designed by talking to children ... In 2010, we should be able to clearly see in policy documents that children have had their views listened to and taken on board. ... A county children's forum should be ... a sizeable body, well able to make enough noise to make sure that what they want to see happen actually happens. I'd like to see ... [that] it's just part of the way society is." – *Community and Enterprise Development Officer with a Local Authority*



# Chapter Two: Methodology

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## Introduction

The research for this study was conducted between August 2001 and March 2002. It comprised the following four elements:

- A literature review and information gathering
- A survey of policy-makers and practitioners
- Interviews with ten policy-makers and practitioners
- Focus group consultations with ten groups of children and young people.

This chapter provides information on the rationale for and implementation of each of these methodologies. Supplementary information is presented in Appendices 1-4.

The scope for implementing the four research methodologies was prescribed by time and resource constraints. In light of these constraints, the Advisory Group for the project agreed that the research be viewed as an exploratory piece of work that could provide a foundation for future research on the theme of consulting children and young people experiencing poverty and social exclusion at the level of public policy.

As noted in the Introduction to this report, the overall aim of the research had originally been envisaged as the identification and evaluation of models of good practice for consulting children and young people experiencing poverty and social exclusion in relation to public policy developments affecting them. In consultation with the Advisory Group, the researchers revised this aim. Our new focus became the identification of key issues for consideration in relation to consulting children and young people at the level of public policy. Within these revised terms of reference, particular attention would be given to children and young people experiencing or at risk of poverty and social exclusion. This revision was prompted by project-related and context-specific factors. These factors included:

- Research actions taken by the researchers during the period August – October 2001, which suggested that the identification of key issues and the adoption of an exploratory and broad-based approach to the presentation of these issues would be a useful contribution to what is an emerging field of inquiry in Ireland
- The fact that consultation with children and young people in relation to public policy is in its infancy in Ireland
- The status of the study as the first stage in a three-phase project, whereby subsequent stages could provide an opportunity to develop guidelines on good practice.

In pursuing this revised aim and implementing the four methodologies, we aimed to create a body of information and opinion that would be of interest and use to policy-makers, practitioners and others in the statutory and NGO sectors whose remit means that children and young people are among their constituents.

## 2.1. Literature Review and Information Gathering

This section comprises three parts:

1. Rationale for and scope of literature review
2. Approaches to literature review/information gathering, including issues arising
3. Conclusion.

### 2.1.1. Rationale and Scope

It was agreed that a literature review would be an essential element of the research given the following objectives that had been envisaged for the study:

- a) Identify and document consultation models with children at an international, national and local level, with particular reference to consultation in relation to policy formulation, design and implementation
- b) Describe and examine how this work was done, with a view to identifying what did and didn't work well, what was learned and achieved. Critically assess the relevance of these consultation models to consultation with children and young people experiencing poverty or other forms of social exclusion in relation to public policy
- c) Identify what policy-making arenas are relevant to consultation with children experiencing poverty and disadvantage, with particular relevance to consultation on the formulation, design and implementation of policy
- d) Identify areas within the policy-making environment where issues relating to children are currently mediated by adults, but potentially could involve the participation of socially excluded children and young people, with particular reference to consultation on the formulation, design and implementation of policy.

In addition to these objectives, it was agreed that the literature review should enable us to:

- e) Establish the meaning of 'consultation' as a mode of involving children and young people in decision-making;
- f) Identify key arguments for and against consulting children and young people, with particular reference to children and young people experiencing poverty or other forms of social exclusion and at the level of public policy.

### 2.1.2. Approaches

The following approaches were used to gather information:

- Desk and online research
- Targeted requests for information
- Informal meetings with relevant individuals
- Conference attendance.

In pursuing these approaches, we prioritised objectives a), b), e) and f) above.

#### Desk and Online Research

Desk and online research was the principal method used. Both activities proved fruitful, yielding information that served objectives a), e) and f) above. However, the following observations are noteworthy, not least because they prompted a decision to undertake the three other actions comprising this element of the research as well as a quantitative survey of relevant policy-makers and practitioners in Ireland:

- We had limited success in identifying opportunities for children and young people experiencing poverty or other forms of social exclusion to be consulted, including in relation to public policy development. This was particularly the case with regard to children and young people out of home and young Travellers. It is not possible to say with certainty whether this was a side-effect of the resource and time constraints within which we were working, symptomatic of a documented trend concerning the under-involvement of these children and young people in consultative processes and/or of past and present opportunities not having been documented in published formats.
- While useful, much of the information generated did not pertain specifically to consultation with socially excluded children and young people and/or in relation to public policy.

Another key finding of the desk/online research and the other approaches taken in the context of the literature review was the absence of documented evaluations of opportunities

that have been created for children and young people to be consulted. This radically curtailed our ability to implement the evaluative dimension to objective b) of the literature review.

### **Targeted Requests for Information**

We decided to supplement our desk and online research by issuing targeted requests for information to the following organisations:

- Member organisations of the Children's Rights Alliance (67 NGOs in Ireland and with a view to gathering information about the Irish context)
- Member organisations of the National Youth Council of Ireland (47 NGOs in Ireland and with a view to gathering information about the Irish context)
- Statutory and NGOs in Northern Ireland (with a view to gathering additional information on recent opportunities that the researchers were aware had been created there)
- European Youth Forum (with a view to gathering additional information on opportunities at European level and/or in other EU countries)
- National Children's Rights Coalitions (70 national children's rights coalitions around the world, a route chosen on the basis that, as national coalitions with experience of contributing to the monitoring and reporting process that exists in relation to the CRC, these organisations were likely to have an informed overview of developments relating to children and young people in their specific countries).

Requests for information were also made to Government bodies, statutory agencies and NGOs in Ireland.

Taken in the round and in light of our follow-up requests for information, the response rate was disappointing. This was particularly so as regards statutory agencies and NGOs in Ireland given that the research findings were likely to be of most relevance to them. While we can only speculate as to the reasons for it, the poor response rate raises an important question, one that may warrant a separate piece of research given that auditing work will continue to be an important dimension to implementing Goal One of the *National Children's Strategy*: Are there reliable means of generating a response rate that can be deemed successful in both quantitative and qualitative terms? We would also suggest that the scope for future auditing will be enhanced by the creation of a requirement under the auspices of Goal One of the Strategy for relevant organisations:

- To compile and publish annual reports that include an evaluative dimension on work they have undertaken in this area
- If they have not undertaken such work, to issue a statement to that effect.

The National Children's Research Dissemination Unit provided for under Goal Two of the Strategy could have a role to play in this regard and in ensuring the availability of information gathered through the creation of this or an equivalent requirement.

While low in percentage terms, the number of responses generated nonetheless constituted a meaningful contribution to the information-gathering dimension to our research. Furthermore, several of the responses furnished us with documentation that had not presented itself through our desk and online research.

### **Informal Meetings with Relevant Individuals**

Opportunities arose to hold informal meetings with five individuals with expertise in the area of youth homelessness. Three one-hour meetings were held, the first with a researcher with a Dublin-based NGO working in the area of homelessness (including youth homelessness), the second with a university-based researcher undertaking research entailing the direct involvement of children out of home, and the third with three practitioners working directly with young people out of home. Given the difficulty we experienced in gathering information on consultation with children and young people out of home, the observations and information provided by these five individuals were especially valuable.

### **Conference Attendance**

One of us attended two conferences in the context of this research project. The first was the International Forum for Child Welfare (IFCW) annual world forum organised by Barnardos, Ireland and held in Limerick in August 2001. Attendance at this conference provided an opportunity to:

- Attend a presentation by the Director of the Children and Youth Foundation of the Philippines (CYFP) entitled 'On Their Own Behalf: Case Studies of Youth Participation in the Philippines'
- Observe the results of various initiatives on the part of the conference organisers to integrate children's and young people's voices and views into the fabric of the conference
- Raise awareness of the research project among other delegates and request information from them.

Organised by Children in Scotland, the second conference took place in Peebles Hydro on 1 and 2 November 2001. Entitled *Children's Voices: Taking Account of the Views of Children and Young People*, the conference proved beneficial to our research since it provided an opportunity to:

- Visit a number of projects/services that provided for varying levels of children's and young people's involvement in decision-making
- Hear papers on and discuss with fellow delegates the themes of involving children and young people in decision-making in the context of the family, school and the community as well as at national level and in relation to public policy
- Find out more about initiatives underway to involve children and young people in decision-making at local and national level in Scotland
- Gather information on relevant initiatives underway in other parts of the UK, in particular in England.

### **2.1.3. Conclusion**

Viewed in light of time and resource constraints, we succeeded in gathering a body of information that exceeded our initial expectations. Due to time constraints, it has not been possible for us to engage with all of the material gathered during the literature review. Furthermore, the parameters of this report preclude a comprehensive approach to representing the breadth and diversity of material we have engaged with. As such, we would recommend that this material be harnessed by the Initiative and/or its participating organisations and/or others as a valuable resource for future research.

## **2.2. Survey of Policy-Makers and Practitioners**

This section comprises four parts:

1. Rationale for choosing quantitative survey
2. Sample selection
3. Breakdown of the sample based on agreed stratification
4. Conclusion.

### **2.2.1. Rationale**

As noted above, there is a lack of documented information in the public domain on what voluntary and statutory organisations are doing to integrate the views of children and young people into relevant areas of decision-making. In light of this, it was agreed that a quantitative survey would provide an opportunity to gather additional information on opportunities that exist within and through voluntary and statutory organisations for children and young people to be consulted in relation to decision-making/policy-making at national and local level in Ireland.

A quantitative survey was disseminated to policy-makers and/or practitioners whose remit might include the direct or indirect involvement of children and young people in decision-making/policy-making processes affecting them. The survey aimed to:

- Identify what opportunities have existed or currently exist in Ireland for children and young people who may be experiencing poverty and/or other forms of social exclusion to make their views heard in relation to public policy development; why and how these opportunities were created; and what lessons might be learned from these experiences from the perspectives of those involved
- Ascertain from policy-makers/practitioners what their understanding of hearing children's views is, what they have learned from engaging in this practice and what would facilitate efforts to develop their work in this area
- Identify attitudes to consulting children and young people, the pros and cons of carrying out such work, and what measures are needed to create meaningful consultation processes with children and young people
- Quantifiably identify levels at which children and young people participate in organisations, how frequently they participate and what methods are being used to enable them to do so.

### Survey Design

The literature review identified a number of studies that have entailed primary research in the area of children/young people's involvement in public decision-making in Ireland. For the purpose of designing a survey for this project, two pieces of work acted as key primary sources: O'Leary's mapping study for NYCI and the Carnegie Young People Initiative<sup>96</sup> and an organisational audit framework outlined in *Seen and Heard?*<sup>97</sup> A pilot questionnaire was designed in light of these sources and the challenges of the project outlined above.

### Pilot Survey

A pilot survey was disseminated to twenty organisations representing statutory and voluntary interests at national, regional and local level. In compiling the sample, we aimed to include the following types of organisations:

- Organisations whose main constituents are children
- Organisations whose main constituents are young people
- Statutory bodies that might have an obligation/need to consult with children/young people
- Organisations whose constituents include children/young people experiencing or at risk of poverty or other forms of social exclusion.

The pilot postal questionnaire was disseminated in August 2001. Twelve of the twenty organisations responded, a 60% response rate. Changes were made to the survey based on respondents' difficulties with the layout of the questionnaire and their qualitative comments.

### 2.2.2. Sample Selection

Based on the pilot questionnaire and discussions with the Advisory Group, it was agreed that the final questionnaire should be disseminated to both policy-makers and practitioners. For the purpose of identifying recipients of the questionnaire, policy-makers were defined as: "Individuals involved in the identification, design, implementation and/or evaluation of policies relating to children and young people." It was agreed that it would be most fruitful to include policy-makers whose remit clearly includes children/young people or who would be aware that their work impacts on the lives of children and young people. Practitioners were defined as: "Individuals with experience of working *directly* with children/young people experiencing or at risk of poverty or other forms of social exclusion." It was felt that practitioners could offer experience-based insights on current practice and advice on the makings of good practice.

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<sup>96</sup> O'Leary (2001), pp. 68-78.

<sup>97</sup> Youth Council for Northern Ireland, *Seen and Heard? Consulting and Involving Young People within the Public Sector* (Northern Ireland: Youth Council for Northern Ireland, 2001), pp. 30-35.

A stratified sample selection was developed based on organisations representing statutory/voluntary, policy-making/practitioner-based interests at national, regional and local level. The following organisations were selected:

- Organisations whose main constituents are children
- Organisations whose main constituents are young people
- Organisations that employ policy-makers involved in the identification, design, implementation and/or evaluation of policies relating to children/young people
- Organisations that employ practitioners with experience of working directly with children/young people
- Organisations whose constituents include children/ young people experiencing or at risk of poverty and/or other forms of social exclusion.

### 2.2.3. Breakdown of the Sample based on agreed Stratification

124 surveys were sent to organisations representing statutory/voluntary, policy-making/practitioner-based interests at national, regional and local level. On foot of the agreed stratification, the chosen sample was broken down into two broad categories: statutory organisations and NGOs. The sample breaks down as follows:

Statutory Organisations	Number of Surveys disseminated
Government Departments/Statutory Agencies	19
County and City Development Boards	16
Partnership Companies	17
Health Boards	11
Total	63
Voluntary/Community Organisations	Number of Surveys disseminated
Children's Organisations (including CRA members)	16
National Youth Organisations (including NYCI members)	13
Participants in Pilot Questionnaire	9
Local Youth Services	9
National Organisations with child/young person remit and/or social inclusion remit	14
Total	61
<b>Overall Total</b>	<b>124</b>

\*Other participants from the pilot stage have been integrated into other categories of the sample.

The final and revised postal questionnaire was sent out in December 2001 with a covering letter (see Appendix 2) and included an SAE. This was followed up in January 2002 by a telephone call to each respondent, requesting him/her to return a completed questionnaire. By mid-February, 59 respondents had replied to the survey, giving a final response rate of 48%.

### Reasons for non-response

Although 48% is an adequate response rate for a postal questionnaire, we have some concerns about the reliability of the data due to the levels of non-response. Reasons for non-response may include:

- Surveys were disseminated with a cover letter asking for the person *best placed* within the organisation to complete the questionnaire. It may be the case that the questionnaire did not reach the right person within the organisations surveyed;
- Organisations that were targeted because they were seen to have a remit to consult with children/young people may not have had someone directly employed to carry out this role;
- Questionnaires were sent out over the Christmas season.

On the positive side, responses were received from across the spectrum of organisations surveyed.

#### **2.2.4. Conclusion**

Supplementing the information gathered through the literature reviews, findings from the survey offer an insight into existing practice and the barriers that need to be overcome if consultation with children/young people at the level of public policy is to become a meaningful reality.

### **2.3. Interviews with Policy-Makers and Practitioners**

This section comprises five parts:

1. Rationale
2. Sample selection
3. Structure and content of interviews
4. Write-up of findings
5. Conclusion.

#### **2.3.1. Rationale**

It was agreed that a small number of interviews would be conducted with relevant policy-makers and practitioners. To complement the aims and findings of the literature review and the survey, it was decided that the focus of these interviews would be policy-makers' and practitioners' attitudes to and observations regarding the involvement of children and young people in public policy development.

#### **2.3.2. Sample Selection**

It was agreed that we would aim to interview ten policy-makers and practitioners. An initial list of prospective interviewees was circulated to members of the Advisory Group for consideration. Following receipt of feedback, a revised list was prepared. A final list of prospective interviewees reflected efforts to:

- Achieve a 50/50 balance between policy-makers and practitioners
- Achieve a 50/50 balance between individuals working in the statutory and NGO sectors
- Include individuals working at national and/or local levels
- Include individuals working in areas of public policy-making and/or practice relevant to children and young people, in particular children and young people experiencing poverty or other forms of social exclusion
- Achieve a cross-section that reflected the public policy concerns and organisational composition of the Initiative.

An initial phone call was made to prospective interviewees to determine their availability for interview and willingness to be interviewed. A written invitation was extended to the ten individuals who had agreed to be interviewed. Accompanying this letter was a list of the questions that interviewees would be asked during the interview. Disseminating the questions in advance was intended to afford interviewees an opportunity to reflect on the questions so that the time available for each interview (approximately one hour) might be maximised. The letter sent to interviewees is presented in Appendix 3 of this report. The list of questions is presented in section 2.3.3 below.

Having received a guarantee that their names would not be used in the report and any other publications arising from the research, interviewees were invited to consider how they would like their comments to be attributed in the report. The titles given to interviewees in the interviewee list below are those selected by the interviewees themselves and/or the organisations to which they are affiliated.

### Interviewee List

Title	Statutory/Non-statutory/NGO	Policy-maker/practitioner	National/local level	Children/Young People
Pavee Point representative	NGO	Practitioner	National/local level	Young Travellers
Practitioner working with young people out of home	NGO	Practitioner	Local level	Children/young people out of home
Children's consultation officer	NGO	Practitioner	National/local level	Children/young people experiencing socio-economic disadvantage
Practitioner working with children and young people with physical disabilities	NGO	Practitioner	Local level	Children/young people with physical disabilities
Public policy-maker at national level	Statutory agency	Public policy-maker	National level	All children/young people, including those experiencing poverty and/or social exclusion
Public policy-maker at national level	Government Department	Policy-maker	National level	Children/young people experiencing socio-economic disadvantage within a particular policy area
Representative of the voluntary youth sector	NGO	Policy-maker	National level	All young people, including those experiencing socio-economic disadvantage
Public policy-maker at national level	Government Department	Policy-maker	National level	All children/young people, including those experiencing socio-economic disadvantage
Community and Enterprise Development Officer with Local Authority	Local Authority/CDB	Policy-maker	Local level	All children/young people, including those experiencing socio-economic disadvantage
Health Board practitioner	Health Board	Practitioner	Local level	All children/young people, including those experiencing socio-economic disadvantage

### 2.3.3. Structure and Content of Interviews

Each of the ten interviews were conducted face-to-face and lasted approximately one hour. A cassette tape recorder was used to record each interview. The questions asked of interviewees were as follows:



**Question 1**

What is your understanding of 'consultation' as a mechanism for involving children and young people in decision-making, in particular at the level of public policy? Does this differ from your understanding of 'consultation' with adults?

**Question 2**

2 (a) Do you think that children and young people can make a meaningful contribution to public policy developments affecting them and thus that consulting them at this level of decision-making can be a worthwhile undertaking?

2 (b) What, if any, impact(s) might consultation with children and young people have on how public policy is made at national, regional and/or local level in Ireland?

2 (c) Do you think that the practice of consulting socially excluded children and young people can be a function of social inclusion? If so, what role(s) do you believe this work might play within a social inclusion agenda?

**Question 3**

If you have previous direct or indirect experience of consulting children and young people in relation to public policy developments at national, regional and/or local level, what have you learned from this experience?

**Question 4**

4 (a) What do you consider to be the key resource implications of creating and sustaining opportunities for consulting children and young people in relation to public policy developments at national, regional and/or local level? (In this context, 'resource implications' might mean financial costs, time, personnel, etc.)

4 (b) If you or the organisation you work for has previously consulted or is currently consulting children and young people, how has this work been funded?

4 (c) By whom do you anticipate future consultative work with children and young people in relation to relevant public policy developments at national, regional and/or local level might be funded?

**Question 5**

Goal One of the *National Children's Strategy* states that "children will have a voice in matters which affect them" and provides for their involvement in decision-making relating to public policy developments at national and local level. It is proposed that the provisions of Goal One will be implemented over a ten-year period.

5 (a) What is your vision of what children and young people having a voice ought to mean in 2010 in the context of the sector in which you currently work?

5 (b) What, in your view, would be of most use to policy-makers and/or practitioners by way of assistance with realising this vision?

**2.3.4. Write-Up of Findings**

The findings of each interview were transcribed from the cassette tape recorder.

**2.3.5. Conclusion**

Due to the knowledge of the interviewees and their willingness to speak candidly to the questions asked of them, the interviews proved a very fruitful dimension to the research, providing a rich seam of observations and viewpoints.

## 2.4. Focus Group Consultations with Children and Young People

This section comprises six sections:

1. Rationale
2. Sample selection
3. Structure and content, including methodologies
4. Evaluation and feedback
5. Write-up of findings
6. Conclusion.

### 2.4.1. Rationale

It was agreed that children and young people should be enabled to contribute to the research study by being invited to participate in focus group consultations. The decision to involve children and young people was taken in light of the Initiative's commitment to provide for the direct involvement of children and young people in its activities and was regarded as particularly desirable given the research theme.

### 2.4.2. Sample Selection

In accordance with good practice, a focus group consultation was piloted with two groups of children and young people. In light of the pilot consultations and time and resource constraints, it was decided that a maximum of 10 focus groups consultations would be conducted. Out of respect for the children and young people who had participated in the pilot phase and because alterations to the format and content arising from the pilot phase were minor, it was agreed that the pilot focus group consultations would count as two of the ten proposed focus groups.

Information on each of the ten focus group consultations conducted is provided below. It was agreed that prospective focus groups involve children and young people aged between 6 and 18 years and at risk of or experiencing poverty or other forms of social exclusion. A pragmatic decision was taken that, at a minimum, the composition of the focus groups should encompass the following aspects of diversity:

- Age
- Geographical location (urban/rural)
- Gender
- Different needs/abilities
- Ethnic/cultural difference.

It was also agreed that efforts would be made to involve children and young people belonging to those groups of children and young people represented by participating organisations in the Initiative: children/young people experiencing poverty; young Travellers; children/young people with disabilities; children/young people out of home or with experience of homelessness. Details relating to the final composition of each of the ten focus groups are as follows:

Group	Age	Gender	Location	Number of Participants	Assisting organisation	Date of Consultation
Socio-economic disadvantage	13-14 years	Girls	Co. Dublin	5	NGO working with children/young people	26.09.01
Socio-economic disadvantage	9-12 years	Girls and boys	Co. Dublin	6	NGO working with children/young people	28.09.01
Socio-economic disadvantage	14-16 years	Girls and boys	Co. Dublin	6	Local Area Partnership	11.12.01
Socio-economic Disadvantage	7-11 years	Girls and boys	Co. Dublin	8	NGO working with children/young people	12.12.01

Socio-economic disadvantage	10-12 years	Girls	Co. Offaly	5	NGO working with children/young people	12.12.01
Socio-economic disadvantage	16-17 years	Girls	Co. Dublin	4	Local Area Partnership	9.01.02
Young Travellers	12-17 years	Girls	Co. Dublin	6	NGO working with Travellers	16.01.02
Young Travellers	11-18 years	Boys	Co. Dublin	6	NGO working with Travellers	22.01.02
Mixed	15-16 years	Girls and boys	Co. Kildare	12	NGO working with children/young people	28.01.02
Children with physical disabilities	9-14 years	Girls and boys	Co. Galway	4	NGO working with people with disabilities	29.01.02

The following points should be made with regard to the information provided above:

- **Group** – The majority of the focus groups involved children and young people experiencing poverty/socio-economic disadvantage. That two focus groups were held with young Travellers arose from a suggestion by the assisting organisation that the consultation would prove more successful if girls and boys were consulted separately. While a request had been made to the assisting organisation concerned to facilitate the involvement of children and young people experiencing poverty/socio-economic disadvantage, the final composition of the focus group held in Co. Kildare was more general and it is not possible to say how many of the participating young people may have been experiencing poverty/socio-economic disadvantage. A consultation was planned with young people with experience of homelessness. However, this consultation had to be cancelled at short notice due to an unforeseen change in the young people's circumstances. Because the timing of this proposed consultation coincided with the latter stages of the research (mid-February 2002), it was not possible to make alternative arrangements to consult with a group of young people with experience of homelessness. Participating children and young people were approached first and foremost as individuals and were not asked or expected to speak in a representative capacity. Furthermore, the observations, comments and ideas which they shared are being treated in the main body of this report as those of individual children and young people. Reference is only made to their status where the children and young people themselves spoke directly to it during the consultations or where it appears to be of particular relevance.
- **Age** – It was agreed that the minimum age of participants would be 6 years on the grounds that, in the context of approaches to consultation with children and young people, children under 6 would have needs and capacities meriting a separate study. It can be seen from the table above that, while it had been intended to facilitate a balanced representation of ages, the final composition of the focus groups meant that the majority of participants were over 11 years of age. While it is difficult to assess the implications of this imbalance, the consistency of responses across age groups reflected in the findings of the focus groups would suggest that the implications may not be of particular significance.
- **Gender** – In total, 37 girls and 25 boys were consulted. This imbalance is first and foremost a side-effect of uptake in response to invitations issued to children and young people to participate.
- **Location** – The urban/rural imbalance was a side-effect of time and resource constraints for this part of the work. As regards the focus groups conducted in Dublin, these took place in six different locations and involved children and young people living in nine different areas of Dublin where there are high levels of socio-economic disadvantage.
- **Number of participants** – In planning the focus groups, it was intended that up to six children and young people would participate in each focus group. The variations presented above arose from the manner in which assisting organisations endeavoured to secure this number of participants, several extending invitations to more than six children and young people in order to secure the involvement of at least six. In some cases, the uptake was less than six and in some cases it was more than six. Where the uptake was more than six, the viability of consulting a larger group was discussed with the assisting organisation. In each case, it was agreed that the consultation could proceed and that it would be desirable to include any child or young person who had indicated an interest in participating. The total number of participants was 62.

- **Assisting organisations** – As can be seen from the table above, assisting organisations were either NGOs or Local Area Partnerships. These organisations are not being named in the interests of securing the anonymity that was guaranteed to the children and young people who participated in the focus groups.

The focus groups were planned and implemented as follows:

- All aspects of the focus groups were planned in consultation with the assisting organisations. Each focus group was facilitated by Karen McAuley with assistance from between one and three staff members/volunteers working with the assisting organisation and known to the children and young people involved.
- Contact with children and young people was made through organisations and individuals working directly with them.
- A letter and consent form was sent to the parents/guardians of prospective participants. An invitation and consent form was sent to prospective participants.
- Six of the consultations took place in a venue regularly attended by participating children and young people. The two consultations with Travellers took place at a central location, the offices of the NGO assisting with the consultations. The two consultations that took place with the assistance of Local Area Partnerships were held at the offices of the Partnerships, situated in or near where participating children and young people live. Where transport was needed, this was organised by the assisting organisations.
- As planned for, the average time available for each consultation was two hours, including breaks. A small budget was available for refreshments and these were organised by the assisting organisations.

#### **2.4.3. Structure and Content, including Methodologies**

As noted above, the average duration of each consultation was two hours, including breaks. The structure of the consultations was designed to accommodate the proposed content. Children and young people were asked a wide range of questions. These are presented in Appendix 4. As questions were posed orally, they were re-phrased and accompanied by examples where required to ensure that participants understood what they were being asked to comment on. The questions asked of participants can be categorised under four general headings:

- Attitudes towards having a say and being consulted
- Issues arising with regard to the planning of consultations
- Issues arising with regard to implementing consultations
- Issues arising in relation to feedback on and evaluation of consultations.

Agreed in consultation with assisting organisations, methodologies were selected and developed that:

- Accommodated the needs and capacities of participants
- Allowed for a broad range of questions to be asked and responded to within a limited time-frame
- Reflected the budget available for this part of the research
- Were feasible within the venues selected for the consultations.

The following three methodologies were developed and, in most cases, implemented:<sup>98</sup>

- **A 'Question and Answer Wall'** – Questions were presented on A3 sheets of paper put up on a wall. In this way, participants could see the questions and their responses being recorded. Participants were also invited to assist with recording the responses. Questions were also presented to participants orally and adapted and/or accompanied by examples so as to ensure that they understood what they were being asked. This was the principal methodology used.

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<sup>98</sup> In a number of instances, there were some minor adaptations with regard to the application of these methodologies. These adaptations were prompted by a variety of circumstances which arose during the consultations themselves.

- **Booklets** – Individual booklets were prepared for participants to enable them to respond in an individual capacity to questions relating to the implementation of consultations. These booklets were developed to accommodate the capacities of younger participants. This was explained to older participants so that they would not feel patronised by the style of the booklets.
- **Graffiti Walls** – A1-size sheets of coloured paper were put up on a wall as an alternative means through which participants could respond, through writing or drawing, to questions relating to the implementation of consultation.

As can be seen from the above descriptions of the methodologies used, the underlying methodology was group discussion. Participants' responses were also recorded using a tape cassette recorder. Consent was sought from the children and young people regarding its use.

#### **2.4.4. Evaluation and Feedback**

At the end of their consultation, participants were invited to complete specially designed evaluation forms. The evaluations of each individual/group are presented in Appendix 4.

Thank you letters were sent to each participant following the consultation. These letters were also used as an opportunity to reiterate the timescale for the project to participants and thus when they might expect to receive feedback on the findings of the study. All participants will receive a report on the findings of the research.

#### **2.4.5. Write-Up of Findings**

The responses recorded by the facilitator, the children and young people themselves and through the use of the cassette tape were written-up and tabulated.

#### **2.4.6. Conclusion**

Participating children and young people responded openly and generously to the questions asked of them during the focus group consultations. That they did was greatly appreciated in light of the following factors:

- In some cases, no previous experience of quasi-formal consultation
- In many cases, no or minimal experience of being consulted on the abstract theme that provided the focus for these focus group consultations
- Limited time available for providing responses and for breaks
- Limited nature of the methodologies used, which relied for the most part on oral responses in the context of group discussion
- The fact that they were contributing to a research project and thus that the results or impact of their involvement, bar the research report and any other publications arising from the research, would not be of a tangible nature.

Notwithstanding these factors, the feedback received from participants through their evaluation forms suggests that the vast majority found the consultations interesting and/or enjoyable and welcomed the opportunity to contribute their observations, opinions and ideas.

These focus groups proved invaluable to the research. They are exhibitiv of children's and young people's capacity to make meaningful contributions and of the corresponding importance of providing for their direct involvement in decision-making processes affecting them.

## Chapter Three: Defining ‘Consultation’

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### Introduction

We suggested in Chapter One that the last decade in Ireland has seen the emergence of a revised approach to governance entailing increasing provision for consultation with civil society in relation to legislative and public policy development. While this development may have led to an enhanced understanding of consultation as a mode of involving people in decision-making, the term ‘consultation’ continues to be used interchangeably with, for example, ‘participation’ and ‘involvement’. Understandable in the context of informal or non-formal dialogue, this practice risks obscuring a clear understanding of the expectations that can be had of ‘consultation’ as a function of public decision-making.

This chapter briefly recalls what consultation has been taken to mean with reference to understandings of consultation that have emerged in relation to the theme of involving children and young people in decision-making. We also present the findings of the first question put to interviewees for this study: What is your understanding of ‘consultation’ as a mechanism for involving children and young people in decision-making, in particular at the level of public policy? Does this differ from your understanding of ‘consultation’ with adults?

### 3.1. Defining Consultation – What the Literature says

Consultation with representative organisations and individual citizens in relation to public policy initiatives can be summarised as being a commitment on the part of government or a government agency to actively listen to and take into consideration the views of an individual or representative organisation on a given set of legislative or public policy proposals. As such, consultation is a mode of involvement that brings with it no guarantee that the viewpoints of individual citizens or representative organisations will be reflected in documents arising from a given public consultation, let alone translated into actions.

As regards adults and public consultation processes relating to public policy development, this understanding of consultation is not common to all actors: individual citizens in particular can have expectations for the fate of their contributions that exceed the promise of consultation, namely to listen in good faith. As it pertains to children and young people, the multiple meanings that can attach to ‘consultation’ are generated not only by their various expectations for the process, but by how consultation with them is approached by those seeking their involvement in a given consultative process. Hayes makes this point during her critical analysis of the consultation with children and young people that was undertaken as part of preparations for the *National Children’s Strategy*. She indirectly suggests that this multiplicity of meanings can be partly attributed a given society’s prevailing conception of childhood and understanding of what children and young people can be expected or should be enabled to contribute:

“The idea of consulting children on issues of relevance to them can mean different things to different people. For some it is no more than including them at a ‘vox pop’ level on topics immediately associated with children such as toys, playgrounds or TV. Freeman (1992) notes that empowerment of children is not ‘... simply a question of redistribution of power. Putting children on decision-making committees ... only scratches the surface and does little to undermine entrenched processes of domination. More is clearly required – ultimately a re-thinking of the culture of childhood.’”<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> Hayes (Forthcoming). Hayes’ italics.

While it may be the case at times, it cannot be assumed that an approach which recognises the involvement of children at “a ‘vox pop’ level” as consultation is symptomatic of bad faith. The fact that such a misunderstanding of consultation can exist suggests the need to arrive at a shared and agreed understanding of what consultation does mean. Arrival at a consensus will ensure that future consultative initiatives involving children and young people will see participants furnished with a consistent and reliable explanation of what being consulted means and of what they can expect from participating in a consultation. In working towards consensus on what ‘consultation’ will mean in the context of implementing Goal One of the Strategy, the National Children’s Office, the National Children’s Advisory Council and other relevant agencies/individuals might consider involving children and young people in:

- This process of definition
- The translation of the agreed definition into language and formats that will make it intelligible to children and young people of different ages and capacities.

There is a considerable body of literature available to facilitate the development of a single, coherent definition of consultation as a mechanism for involving children and young people in decision-making, including in relation to public policy development. In a period spanning over thirty years, Arnstein (1969) Hart (1992), John (1996), Franklin (1997), Treseder (1997) and Lansdown (2001)<sup>100</sup> are among those to have forwarded definitions of consultation and, moreover, to have situated these definitions schematically in relation to other modes of involvement.<sup>101</sup> Roger Hart’s adaptation of Arnstein’s ladder of participation is worth mentioning because it was the model chosen for presentation in the *National Children’s Strategy*. His ladder proposes eight levels, beginning with three levels signifying involvement, but non-participation (manipulation; decoration; and tokenism). These are followed on an upward scale by five levels of involvement representing different degrees of participation (assigned, but informed; consulted and informed; adult-initiated, shared decisions with children; child-initiated and directed; and, top of Hart’s conceptual heap, child initiated, shared decisions with adults). Within this conceptual scheme, it is what Hart terms “assigned, but informed” involvement that might be seen to characterise the consultation with children and young people that took place in relation to the *National Children’s Strategy*. Information gathered for this study suggests that this understanding and practice is widespread. It is therefore useful, perhaps, to present Hart’s conception of the defining characteristics of “assigned, but informed” involvement:

- “The children understand the intentions of the project”
- “They know who made the decisions concerning their involvement and why”
- “They have a meaningful (rather than ‘decorative’) role”
- “They volunteer for the project *after* the project was made clear to them”.<sup>102</sup>

As Hayes’ conception of the *National Children’s Strategy* consultation illustrates, existing consultations with children and young people are vulnerable to characterisation as tokenism, a level of involvement that Hart defines as:

“... instances in which children are apparently given a voice, but in fact have little or no choice about the subject or the style of communicating it, and little or no

<sup>100</sup> Arnstein, S.R., ‘Eight rungs on the ladder of citizen participation’, in *Journal of the American Institute of Planners*, Vol. 45 (1979); Hart, R., *Children’s Participation: from Tokenism to Citizenship* (Florence: UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre, 1992); John, M., *Children in Charge: Children’s Right to a Fair Hearing* (London: Jessica Kingsley, 1996); Boyden, J. and Ennew, J., *Manual for Participatory Research* (Stockholm: Radda Barnen, 1997), p. 53; Treseder, P., *Empowering Children and Young People: Promoting Involvement in Decision Making* (London: Save the Children/Children’s Rights Office, 1997); Lansdown, G., *Promoting Children’s Participation in Democratic Decision-Making* (Florence: UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre, 2001).

<sup>101</sup> Hayes (Forthcoming) provides a useful synopsis of the definitions and schemas developed by these and others and, in so doing, makes reference to some of the criticisms that can be and have been levelled at one or more of these definitions/schemas.

<sup>102</sup> Hart (1992), p. 12.

opportunity to formulate their own opinions ... Tokenism might be a way to describe how children are sometimes used on conference panels ... If no explanation is given to the audience or to the children of how they were selected, and which children's perspectives they represent, this is usually sufficient indication that a project is not truly an example of participation. This does not mean that young people cannot genuinely and effectively be involved in conference panels. If such events are organised in a participatory manner, and the children are comfortable with that medium of communication, they can be valuable experiences."<sup>103</sup>

The relativism that informs Hart's conception of tokenism is noteworthy since it connotes how one or more aspects of the approach taken to a given consultation can make or break its status as an example of real involvement or tokenism. As such, Hart's relativism underscores the self-awareness that is required on the part of those planning a given consultation. Furthermore, to the extent that the above excerpt illustrates the subjectivity that informs the characterisation of opportunities to hear young voices, it underscores the desirability of arriving at consensus on what 'consultation' with children and young people ought to mean.

The inclusion of Hart's ladder in the *National Children's Strategy* should not result in its being approached uncritically by all those with a role to play in creating opportunities for involving children and young people in public policy development in Ireland. Hart's ladder has been a focus of critical scrutiny. An aspect of the critique that we concur with is his use of a ladder to present his eight levels of involvement. A difficulty with this vertical model is that it represents the relationship between these eight levels as static and hierarchical. This approach belies the dynamic and porous relationship that can exist between these different levels of involvement and obscures the possibility that "assigned, but informed" involvement done well can be more meaningful and effective than, for example, "child initiated, shared decisions with adults" done badly. This point was made, with reference to Arnstein's ladder, by one interviewee for this study:

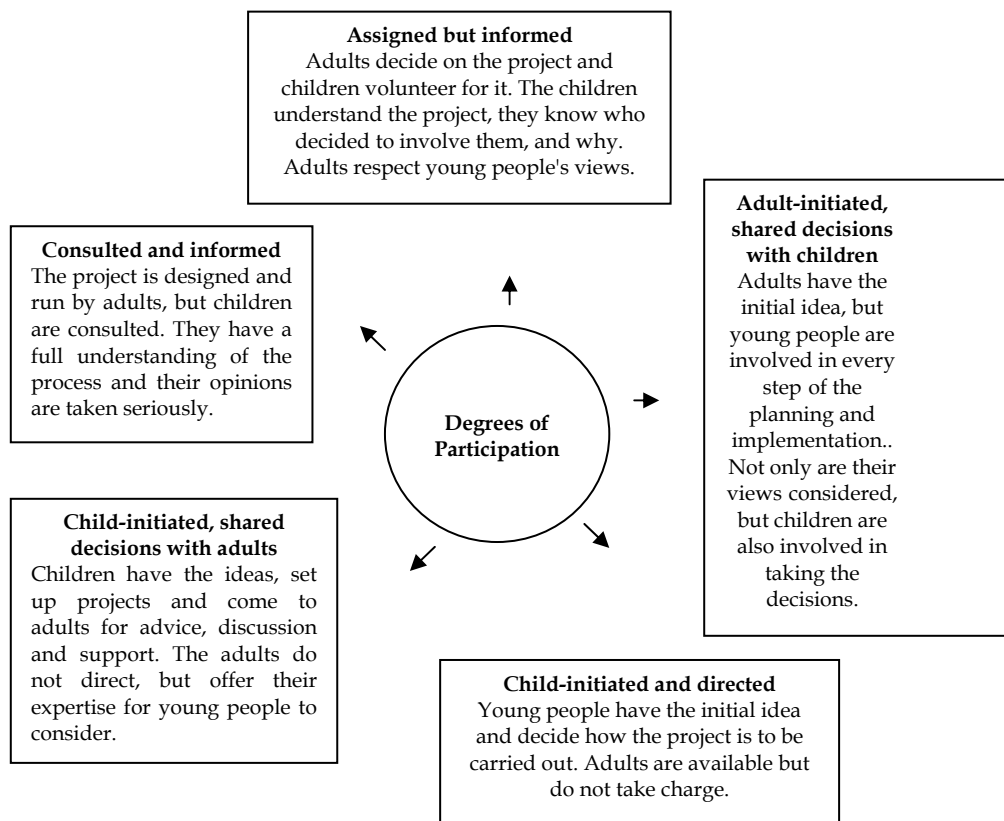
"If you look at ... Arnstein's ladder and consultation is somewhere near the bottom and young people making decisions at the top ... One of the things I have a real problem with [is] the inference that consultation is lesser and not valuable ... It's seen as the lowest form of participation and the lowest form of anything is always going to be negative ... I have seen and heard of consultations with children and young people that have happened in a very real way and have had far more impact and direct deliverables for children and young people than supposed participation ... You'd be far better off putting your money into a good consultation. If it's done right, it can effect change." – *Representative of the voluntary youth sector*

As this comment illustrates, it is not only the meaning of consultation, but the esteem in which it is held that can be a focus for divergent opinions. As such and to facilitate reflection on what consultation ought to mean, it will be useful to present an alternative schema as well as a practice-based definition of consultation. We would suggest that the following dynamic, non-hierarchical model constructed by Treseder is a preferable basis for moving towards a shared understanding of consultation as a mechanism for involving children and young people in public policy development. A particular merit of this model is that it promotes an understanding of different degrees of involvement as each having the potential to be the most appropriate under a given set of circumstances. As such, it emphasises the need for a non-prescriptive approach that takes account of the specific conditions that will necessarily arise in relation to a given consultation, not least of which will be the needs and capacities of the children and young people concerned.

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<sup>103</sup> Hart (1992), p. 10.





Phil Treseder, *Empowering Children and Young People: Training Manual* (London: Save the Children, 1997), p.7.

Based on a brainstorming session with group workers who attended the Action Programme for Youth Summit 2000, the following practical definition of meaningful consultation was developed by Save the Children in Scotland for inclusion in its recently published toolkit for consulting children and young people on public policy issues:<sup>104</sup>

**Defining 'good' consultation**  
(points not in any order)

- The ability to effect change or the consultation is useless
- Make the aims and objectives of the consultation clear
- Do not raise unrealistic expectations
- Consider a variety of methods to give feedback to policy makers as they can have more impact (e.g. video, drama, graffiti wall, and young people using Power Point in a local authority setting have all worked well)
- Have a 'chill-out' area at large consultation events
- It should be informative and you may need good quality preparation materials
- Small groups are an advantage
- The importance of the right language and no jargon
- Make it inclusive and make it fun

<sup>104</sup> Madden (2001), p.9.

- Good venues and good food are important for large consultation events
- Speed of feedback – the quicker the better and does not have to be finished reports
- Drama in consultation events and workshops can be very effective
- Keep people's attention and keep the consultation process interesting
- People being comfortable
- Planning is so important (very careful planning)
- Ground rules are good in a group situation
- Parts of the consultation fitting together well
- Equal opportunities is important
- Meet young people on the streets (e.g. outside shops and play areas)
- Make it representative – don't involve just one type of person
- Get policy makers on board in the beginning and through all stages
- Having a 'link person' can sometimes be useful (e.g. to transfer views to the Scottish Executive and then give feedback to young people)
- Young people giving feedback to policymakers themselves can be very effective
- Question time sessions are a good idea
- Feedback (both directions)
- Remember the everyday things (e.g. food, transport)
- Make a jigsaw of good consultation practice
- Remember the principles of participation
- Remember the best interests of children and young people and children's rights
- Consider the ownership of the information
- It must not be tokenistic
- Involving children in the different stages of the process
- Young people freely taking part
- The language you use should be clear and straightforward

While we do not propose to analyse this checklist, we would suggest that many of points made do provide for the makings of meaningful consultation. The issues relating to the planning, implementation and evaluation of consultation evoked by this checklist are raised and discussed in Chapters 5 to 12.

As a final stimulus for moving towards an agreed understanding of how consultation can be a meaningful and enabling mode of involving children and young people in public policy development, we should emphasise that the literature frequently represents different modes of involving children and young people in decision-making in terms of the distribution of authority, influence and responsibility between adults and children/young people that a given mode entails. Within this, there appears to be a shared understanding of consultation as a mode of involvement where the balance of power rests firmly with adults and that includes the following defining characteristics:

- Adults formulate, design and run the initiative
- Children/young people are provided with an opportunity to contribute
- Children/young people are given the information they need to make an informed decision regarding their involvement as well as informed contributions
- Adults listen actively to participating children/young people and are committed to taking their views seriously.
- Adults decide what to do with the material generated through the consultation
- Adults provide children/young people with feedback.

For those with experience of public consultation involving adults, these characteristics are likely to strike a familiar chord. A corresponding question that arises is whether and, if so, in what ways 'consultation' as a mechanism for involving people in decision-making does, can

or should have a different meaning in relation to children/young people than it has in relation to adults. Policy-makers' and practitioners' views on this question are presented in the next section of this chapter.

### 3.2. Defining Consultation – Interview Findings

The first question put to interviewees focused on the meaning of consultation: What is your understanding of 'consultation' as a mechanism for involving children and young people in decision-making, in particular at the level of public policy? Does this differ from your understanding of 'consultation' with adults?

In responding to this question and/or during the course of their interview, most of the interviewees made one or more general comments in relation to consultation as a function of public policy development at national and/or local level in Ireland. As can be seen from the quotations below, while some interviewees provided quasi-neutral definitions, others chose to be more attitudinal and/or context specific:

#### Defining 'Consultation'

- "From my own experience of consulting young people, it would be ... involving young people from the beginning [and] ... as a stakeholder" – *Health Board practitioner*
- "It means ... finding mechanisms for collecting ... views, ... eliciting information that can then inform the development of policy" – *Public policy-maker at national level*
- "My notion of it is getting young people's views and getting them to participate in a process of decision-making and influencing decision-making" – *Practitioner working with young people out of home*
- "It's asking them ... their opinions, ... their ideas" – *Pavee Point representative*
- "It's the involvement of children in matters which affect them" – *Public policy-maker at national level*
- "Consulting is not just about asking people their views. It's about asking people about something that's going to happen and to help colour what is going to happen" – *Public policy-maker at national level*
- "I think the whole process is about listening and taking people's views into account ... Consultation is all about listening to what people want, whether it's adults or ... children" – *Children's consultation officer*
- "I actually have problems with the term consultation ... because I think it's terribly broad ... It covers a multitude and it's one of those things people can just cover themselves with and say 'Well, we consulted'" – *Representative of the voluntary youth sector*
- "What I mean when I talk about consultation is a process, an interaction, a chance to dialogue with people, where people are sharing ideas ... to come to a common ground" – *Community and Enterprise Development Officer with Local Authority*

These general definitions entail a conception of consultation as a *process* and, moreover, as a process which at its heart is the same regardless of who is being consulted. Most interviewees also proposed that consultation *should not* differ in its application to children/young people and adults. In doing so, several interviewees identified specific aspects of consultation that are or should be the same for children/young people and adults:

### Similarities between consulting Adults and consulting Children/Young People

- “I think that consultation with both groups could be quite similar ... I think that what you’re trying to achieve with both would be similar.” – *Health Board practitioner*
- “I think it’s basically the same thing as [consultation with adults]. It’s asking them ... their opinions, ... their ideas” – *Pavee Point representative*
- “I don’t think it should differ from our understanding of consultation with adults because the views expressed still have to be ... distilled in policy development work” – *Public policy-maker at national level*
- “It has some commonalities in terms of it’s being a sign of respect and recognition ... Under ... the whole Strategic Management Initiative in the public sector, they [children/young people] are customers and ... have a right to have a say like any customer” – *Public policy-maker at national level*
- “I do think that consultation as a mechanism, be it for children or adults, should be the same” – *Representative of the voluntary youth sector*
- “In terms of the end result being to hear what the client group are meaning to say, then no: the end result is that they have a voice and are heard” – *Practitioner working with children and young people with physical disabilities*
- “The end product and the principles that you use in consulting ... should be the same” – *Community and Enterprise Development Officer with Local Authority*

However, all interviewees also identified differences. These included:

- The status of children/young people and adults in society
- The ages of participating children and young people
- Consultation as a process
- The different levels of decision-making at which children and young people might be consulted
- The different stages of a consultation process (approach, planning, implementation, feedback and evaluation)
- The different dimensions of one or more of these stages (for example, methodologies, treatment of views)
- Involving a particular group of children and young people at risk of or experiencing poverty and social exclusion – for example, children and young people out of home and young Travellers.

### Differences between consulting Adults and consulting Children/Young People

- “I think for a lot of consultation with young people ... there’s a lot of tokenism ... They’re consulted to see what they want and then it goes back to a group of adults who decide ‘We can or we can’t do this’. ... Young people have a particular way of looking at things ... Adults are more streetwise ... One thing about young people, they’re not caught up in politics ... They’ve a very clear-cut way [of thinking]” – *Health Board practitioner*
- “It’s more complex ... trying to get young people’s views and trying to access them ... We would work with a quite a marginalised group of young people out of home. They’re quite reticent, I think, to get involved at any level ... Because their experiences ... are that they’re very marginalised and they haven’t been consulted, ... whereas ... adults like being consulted and join in very quickly ... It makes more demands on the people facilitating it and also on time to try to get young people involved ... Adults are used to it ... Certainly professionals working

with young people are used to being asked and at participating at different levels in terms of policy-making. But young people aren't ... I think ... it would have to be very imaginative in looking at the way to include them [children/young people out of home] and for them to feel that they are included in it." – *Practitioner working with young people out of home*

- "The difference is how you do it and, maybe, how you interpret ... what they're saying ... Young people [talk] quite differently from adults ... It's how you interpret what they're saying. I certainly think for young Travellers ... the interpretation can be quite different from what young settled people are saying ... You need to be clear around what you're hearing ... You know, you can listen and not interpret [correctly]" – *Pavee Point representative*
- "They're not full citizens in the sense of an adult with voting rights. That has two implications. The first is that ... because they don't hold that full citizenship ... their position in terms of what the purpose of the consultation [is] must be in some way different from adult [consultation] processes ... [Consultation with them] must reflect the reality ... that they aren't full citizens ... At the same time, because they don't have a vote, ... and they are a third of the population, ... there is ... a particular onus to consult with children because there's no other way they have of having their views heard ... Does it differ from consultation with adults? Yes ... Adults tend to be more aware and understand the nature of ... the process they're getting involved in ... With children, ... one has to assume that they don't necessarily understand where you're coming from ... The amount of time and effort taken, therefore, in relation to children and young people ... is quite different. It's a different process" – *Public policy-maker at national level*
- "Obviously you have to take into consideration themes and issues and age-appropriateness" – *Children's consultation officer*
- "I think there's a difference in how that [consultation] is perceived by adults and children ... Consultation has to be age-appropriate ... It may not be as valuable to ask a young person what they think their local county council should be doing, but ... if you break it down and ask them the specifics of things that affect them, ... then they will have ideas ... Adults can make ... a broader statement around ... how things affect their lives and have a longer term view of things based on their experience" – *Representative from the voluntary youth sector*
- "Consultation in relation to adults is straightforward ... In relation to children, consultation ... comes through adults speaking, as they understand it, on behalf of the child" – *Practitioner working with children and young people with physical disabilities*
- "You have to be very sensitive to the audience you're addressing and you have to be able to pitch and tailor the consultation process to that level. And I do think it is quite challenging ... You do need to manage it, I think, quite sensitively ... You can't have a one-size fits all consultation process ... The challenge is to further segment your audience ... The issue is that there are no 'children' any more than there are 'women' ... You have to figure it out in terms of a) the principles underlying your consultation and b) the target group" – *Public policy-maker at national level*
- "I think in terms of the methodology you'd use ... it would have to be different ... When we would consult with adults we'd expect a certain level of analysis that we wouldn't necessarily expect ... from children ... We wouldn't expect it to be put in the same way ... We have to look at different structures that we would use with adults" – *Community and Enterprise Development Officer with Local Authority*

These differences connote a multi-faceted challenge currently facing all those charged with creating meaningful and inclusive opportunities for children and young people to be consulted at the level of public policy. However, it is an additional difference invoked by several interviewees that strikes us as particularly challenging and thus meriting of a specific mention. Relating to the treatment of children's/young people's views, it is the question of how those responsible for a given consultation might demonstrate to young participants that their views have been taken on board. Arguing that initial experiences of consultation need to be positive for children and young people if their future involvement is to be secured, a number of interviewees suggested that participants would need tangible evidence of their views having been 'taken on board' and that providing such evidence would require a commitment to implement some if not all of what children and young people say. For some interviewees, this was particularly important with regard to children and young people experiencing poverty or other forms of social exclusion.

### **'Consultation' - Demonstrating due Consideration for Young Voices**

- "It's a very powerful question ... to ask a young person ... what they think ... because a lot of young people have never been asked ... In that sense, they need to know that it's going somewhere" – *Health Board practitioner*
- "The project involves consultation with children ... from 9 to 16 and their families ... They're not only a socially excluded group, but ... a group who have needs that they may not conceive are being fully met. One of the things we're saying is that when we go out and hold interviews with these people, we ... go out with a Health Board person ... The Health Board has committed that if that person contacts them ... [with] a problem, they'll sort that particular problem simply because they're a very vulnerable group of people to ask about their needs. And if you do that ... and you don't do anything about it, that is immoral in my view and I wouldn't [be] part of a public policy approach if it was seen to be intolerable. So, I think it needs to be brought through from that perspective, that if you're going to go out, you have to think about what you're doing with this particular group. Because their needs tend to be greater, they'll have a greater expectation of what you're doing ... Sometimes you find these people are quite fraught and this is the first person who's actually come out to them and asked them ... And you can't just walk off saying 'Well, sorry for creating all this angst, but I'm gone now' ... Again ... the danger is that people will use [that] as a reason for not doing it [consultation] ... It can be managed" – *Public policy-maker at national level*
- "I do think there's a degree [to which] you have to say you're going to take on board what [young] people say ... If you don't put anything down for young people, I think it will further disillusion them ... When I [say] 'take on board', I mean implement what young people are saying" – *Pavee Point representative*
- "... the whole thing about expectations and what we do with that ... Again, there's a difference [with] children and young people ... if you ask me what I want, then I expect to see it. Which is a fair enough expectation" – *Representative from the voluntary youth sector*
- "I think they do need to see the immediate impact of something they have said" – *Practitioner working with children and young people with physical disabilities*

Two interviewees also suggested, however, that it might be preferable to manage children's and young people's expectations of consultation rather than make a blanket commitment to implementing what they have to say in advance of hearing it. One interviewee also suggested that it would be patronising to children and young people to do what they say simply because they are children and young people. This view was shared by a practitioner working with young people out of home:

### **'Consultation' - Managing Children's and Young People's Expectations**

- 'I think you have to be clear ... about their expectations, about your expectations of where this is going ... What often happens ... young people are asked ... without understanding why ... without understanding where it's going, what the idea behind it is" – *Health Board practitioner*
- "I'd be saying 'Well, you mightn't get anything immediate out of it, but it's important in terms of making sure that your issues are properly reflected and it helps us to argue' ... They need to understand why they're doing it ... I don't think everybody expects something for themselves, but at least they understand that it's contributing in some way, so it's worth making the effort ... The other question is, do you simply take on board? What, for instance, if you did a consultation around something with young people and the quality of it ... wasn't up to scratch, would you use it just because it's children? Is that not disparaging?" – *Public policy-maker at national level*
- "I think young people ... understand that it's not once you say something, it happens. And ... there's no point including stuff for the sake of it because that just makes it false ... If the purpose is to constructively influence policy, then I think it has to be seen that it's related and worthwhile what they're saying" – *Practitioner working with young people out of home*

Engagement with this thorny issue is not unique to the policy-makers and practitioners interviewed for this study. Moreover, there is no clear-cut response to it available. For example, the question of whether it might not be "immoral" to consult a socially excluded child or young person about their needs and then walk away leaving them empty handed is a very challenging one. In terms of responding to the issue, we would suggest that the following additional arguments warrant consideration:

- To implement what children and young people say because they are children and young people is to inculcate a misconception of the scope for active citizenship afforded by consultation as it currently applies to adults. It is also a mis-education in representative democracy, the framework for the democratic process in this country.
- To implement what children and young people say because they are children and young people has major implications for the process of public policy development: if such a practice was to become established, it could reasonably be argued that consultation as a mechanism for facilitating the involvement of adults in decision-making should be amended in much the same way.
- To implement what children and young people say because they are children and young people is to leave them vulnerable to manipulation by individuals or representative groups whose voices would not currently be afforded the same weight in the context of 'consultation' with civil society in relation to matters of public policy.
- In light of the different modes of involvement described earlier in this chapter, it is arguable that a mode of involvement which entails implementing what children and young people say because they are children and young people is no longer 'consultation'.

### 3.3. Implications

Implications and recommendations arising from the findings presented in this chapter are presented below.

There is a need for the National Children's Office and the National Children's Advisory Council in consultation with other relevant/interested parties to:

- Move towards an agreed and shared understanding of what 'consultation' ought to mean as a mechanism for involving children and young people in relevant public policy developments at national and local level
- Consider the involvement of children and young people in arriving at this definition and/or in its translation into language and formats that are accessible to children and young people of different ages and capacities
- Agree on any differences that *ought* to exist between consultation as mechanism for involving adults and as a mechanism for involving children/young people in public policy development
- Seriously consider, in light of its far-reaching implications, whether a 'positive action' approach should be taken with regard to the treatment of views put forward by children and young people and/or by children and young people experiencing poverty or other forms of social exclusion in the context of consultative processes relating to public policy.



# Chapter Four: To Consult or not to Consult? That is *the* Question

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## Introduction

This chapter aims to highlight key arguments that continue to inform debate around whether children and young people should be consulted, including at the level of public decision-making. Drawing on the literature, the first section summarises these arguments. Focusing on findings arising from the survey and interviews, the two subsequent sections present what policy-makers and practitioners have to say in relation to this key question. As regards the interviews, policy-makers and practitioners were asked whether they felt children and young people might have a meaningful contribution to make to public policy development in Ireland and whether consulting socially excluded children and young people could be a function of social inclusion in one or more ways. Their responses will be of particular interest to readers whose work impacts directly or indirectly on children and young people experiencing poverty and/or other forms of social exclusion. The fourth section of this chapter presents what children and young people who participated in the focus groups had to say in response to the question of whether children and young people should have a say when plans are being made that affect them. In the final section, we identify key implications arising from the findings.

## 4.1. To consult or not to consult? – What the Literature says

From the literature reviewed, it is apparent that ‘the voice of the child’ is emerging as a live issue that is attracting both curiosity and concern. As we illustrated in Chapter One, there is growing interest in and evidence of opportunities for children and young people of different ages and with different needs and capacities to contribute their views and ideas to decision-making processes affecting them, including policy developments at local, regional, national and international level. Within this context, the debate continues as to whether children and young people should be consulted at all, and in particular at the level of public decision-making and in relation to public policy development. The arguments fuelling this debate see ideological, socio-cultural, political and practical reasons being brought into play by exponents and opponents alike.<sup>105</sup>

Before summarising these arguments, we would like to emphasise two points and suggest that readers might keep them in mind when considering the arguments for and against consulting children. Firstly, we would agree with Roberts that “there may be occasions when ... involvement may be exploitative or inappropriate”<sup>106</sup> and support the thesis that doing consultation badly is likely to be worse than not doing it at all. Furthermore, we would suggest that doing consultation badly with children/young people experiencing poverty or other forms of social exclusion in relation to public policy development is likely to do more harm than good. It threatens to exacerbate any existing sense of marginalisation felt by these children and young people and, by virtue of producing unsatisfactory outcomes, to curtail policy-makers and practitioners alike in their willingness to facilitate these children’s and young people’s future involvement in public policy developments affecting them. Secondly, we propose that many of the arguments for and against consulting children resemble those that have been put forward in the past in relation to consulting adult members of civil society in relation to public policy. As such, the way in which the debate around consulting children

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<sup>105</sup> Many texts in the literature represent the arguments for and against involving children and young people in decision-making. See, for example, Lansdown (2001), Madden (2001) and Griffiths et al (n.d.).

<sup>106</sup> Roberts, H., ‘Listening to Children: and Hearing Them’, in *Research with Children: Perspectives and Practices* edited by P. Christensen and A. James (London & New York: Falmer Press, 2001), pp. 225-240 (p. 225).

and young people evolves should be of interest to all those with a stake or interest in the future status and role of civil society in participative democracy.

**Table 1: Key and common arguments for / against consulting children and young people**

In some cases, the arguments presented below have been adapted to take account of the Irish context.

To Consult	Not to Consult
<p>Children/young people have a right to be heard in relation to decision-making processes affecting them. Children/young people are as much 'customers' and 'clients' as anyone else.</p> <p>Parents/guardians and other adults responsible for their care do not always act or speak in children's/young people's best interests. Children's right to be heard is a function of their right to be protected.</p> <p>All relevant organisations, including representative organisations, should speak with as well as for children/young people.</p> <p>Refusing or failing to provide opportunities for children/young people to be heard is infantilising.</p> <p>Children/young people have a right to decide whether they wish to exercise their right to be heard. If they do not wish to be consulted, they do not have to participate.</p> <p>Legislative or other provisions require that children/young people are consulted.</p> <p>Consulting children/young people will lead to improved and more relevant policies and services because children/young people can bring knowledge, insights and perspectives that are unique to them. Children/young people can make informed and meaningful contributions if enabled to do so.</p> <p>Existing structures of decision-making can and ought to be adapted to accommodate consultation with children/young people.</p> <p>Children/young people are more likely to use and respect services provided for them if they have been involved in the planning of these services.</p> <p>Being consulted is a source of valuable learning for children/young people. It is a part of their civic education that can strengthen their understanding of and commitment to democracy as well their respect for human rights.</p>	<p>Children must learn to take responsibility before they can be granted rights.</p> <p>Parents/guardians should exercise children's/young people's right to be heard on their behalf.</p> <p>The interests of children/young people are already articulated by their representative organisations.</p> <p>Giving children a right to be heard in relation to decision-making curtails their childhood by foisting adulthood on them prematurely.</p> <p>Children/young people do not want to be consulted.</p> <p>Consulting children is not part of the organisation's remit.</p> <p>Children/young people lack the maturity, knowledge and skills to make meaningful contributions to decision-making, especially decision-making relating to public policy development and service provision.</p> <p>It is not possible to accommodate consultation with children/young people within existing decision-making structures.</p> <p>Affording children/young people the opportunities to be heard will undermine their respect for adult authority and that of their parents/guardians.</p>

The experience of being consulted and having their views taken seriously will encourage children/young people to be active participants in society as adults.	Public policy and political processes are of no interest to children/ young people. Young people are alienated from and cynical about politics.
Guidelines do exist and training is now available or will be made available in the near future.	There are no guidelines or training courses in place to facilitate consultative work with children/young people.
The provision for enabling children/young people to be heard as a matter of national public policy means that the necessary resources, including skills training should/will be made available.	There are insufficient resources available (money, personnel and/or trained personnel, time) to consult with children/young people.

## 4.2. To consult or not to consult? - Survey findings

The survey sought to gather information and views on a number of issues that are relevant to this chapter:

- Whether organisations are currently consulting children/young people
- Reasons why organisations do not currently consult with children/young people
- Whether respondents believe children/young people should be consulted
- Views on why children/young people should be consulted in relation to decision-making, including at a public policy level
- Views on possible barriers to consulting children/young people in relation to public policy development.

The findings in relation to each of these questions are presented below and are accompanied by a brief analysis.

### 4.2.1. Does the organisation consult with children/young people?

Recipients of the survey were asked to indicate whether their organisation currently consults with children and young people. As Table 2 indicates, the majority of responding organisations said that they do.

**Table 2**

Does the organisation currently consult with children/young people?

	No.	%
Yes	45	76
No	14	24
Total	59	100

As Table 3 shows, differences emerge when these figures are further broken down in terms of organisational type, i.e. the status of the organisation as voluntary or statutory:

**Table 3**

Does the organisation consult with children/young people? Breakdown according to organisational type

	Statutory (%)	Voluntary (%)
Yes	69	85
No	31	15
Total	100	100
No.	32	27

Voluntary organisations are more likely to consult with children and young people, with 85% of voluntary organisations carrying out this role compared to 69% of statutory organisations. In other words, only 15% of responding voluntary organisations has *not* consulted with children/young people compared with 31% of statutory organisations. With respect to Government Departments sampled in this survey, it would appear that they are least likely to consult with children and young people. This finding is significant since it suggests that the challenge of structurally embedding children's and young people's voices in decision-making relating to public policy development could be a sizeable one.

#### 4.2.2. Reasons why organisations do not currently consult with children/young people

Organisations that do not currently consult with children and young people were asked to indicate why they do not.

**Table 4**

Reasons why organisations do not currently consult with children/young people<sup>107</sup>

Reasons	%
Not part of the organisation's remit (n=5)	8
No structures or guidelines in place to facilitate consultation (n=6)	10
No resources (personnel, funding etc.) available to facilitate consultation (n=4)	7
Personnel not trained to consult with children/young people (n=3)	5
Children/young people do not have the skills needed for decision-making/policy-making (n=1)	2
Children/young people do not want to be consulted (n=1)	2
Past experience has shown that no real benefits accrue from consulting children/young people (n=0)	0
No response (n=39)	66

As Table 4 indicates, the majority of organisations (10%) who do not consult with children and young people pointed to the absence of structures or guidelines to facilitate this work. Another principal reason given was that consultation with children and young people is not part of the organisation's remit (8%). This latter finding is a cause for some concern given that surveys were disseminated to organisations that were seen to have a remit in relation to policy development and service provision affecting children and young people. It suggests that a significant minority of relevant policy-makers and practitioners do not or might not recognise children and young people as being among their constituents and/or that they may not think it necessary to consult them. Identifying where this mindset is most prevalent and finding ways of redressing it are additional challenges facing those charged with implementing Goal One of the *National Children's Strategy*, in particular the National Children's Office.

Organisations would appear to hold opposing views on the merits of consulting children and young people, their reasons reflecting those to have emerged from the literature review. Some organisations that do not currently consult with children and young people feel that it might be beneficial to do so. Others appear uncertain as to whether it is necessary for them to consult with children and young people directly:

<sup>107</sup> Only respondents who answered 'no' to whether their organisation consults with children/young people replied to this question.

- “Consultation has occurred with organisations working with/representing children rather than directly with children themselves. Direct consultation with children has not previously arisen as a consideration.”
- “The population of people represented by the organisation, both adults and children, have specific and sensitive needs, where consultation has to be done. With support and training as well as innovative methodology requiring time and other resources.”
- “The organisation has consulted, and does regularly [consult] carers and families of people with intellectual disability. However, consultation with people with a learning disability is still new to us; but we plan to move forward soon.”

#### 4.2.3. Should children and young people be consulted?

The findings of the survey reveal a discrepancy between rhetoric and reality in relation to consultation with children and young people. As noted in section 4.2.1, the majority of responding organisations have consulted with children and young people. However, in response to the question ‘Do you think children/young people *should* be consulted in relation to decision-making/policy making that affects them?’, *all* respondents answered ‘Yes’:

**Table 5** – Do you believe that children/young people should be consulted in relation to decision-making/policy-making that affects them?

	Number	%
Yes	55	100
No	0	0
Total	55	100

Viewed alongside the reasons why organisations do not currently consult with children and young people, this response would suggest that what is most needed is awareness raising and practical support to facilitate organisations in the creation of meaningful and sustainable opportunities for children and young people to be consulted. The above finding would suggest that the time is ripe for doing so.

#### 4.2.4. Reasons why children and young people should be consulted

Recipients of the questionnaire were also asked to indicate why they thought children and young people should be consulted in relation to decision-making and policy-making processes affecting them. The findings in relation to this question are presented in Table 6 below.

**Table 6** – Reasons to consult children/young people in relation to decision-making/policy-making

	V.S**	S.	N.S	Unsure	%	No.
C/yp* have a right to be consulted	83	15	0	2	100	54
C/yp have insights and perspectives to offer different from adults	72	28	0	0	100	54
Leads to better decision-making	61	35	2	2	100	54
Source of valuable learning for children and young people	71	21	6	2	100	53
Children/young people engage more with services if they are consulted	54	30	9	7	100	54
Legislation requires the org. to consult with children/young people	35	14	23	28	100	52

\* c/yp= children/young people

\*\* V.S= very significant, S= significant, and N.S= not significant

A significant majority of respondents (83%) identified children's and young people's right to be heard as the principal very significant reason for doing so. In light of continuing low levels of public awareness of children's rights and the CRC in Ireland, this finding can be welcomed by those organisations advocating in the area of children's and young people's rights in Ireland. It suggests an improved awareness and acceptance of children's and young people's status as rights holders. That so many respondents (72%) believe that children and young people should be consulted because they can bring different perspectives and insights to existing decision-making processes affecting them also bodes well. It suggests that policy-makers and practitioners are confident that consulting children and young people can inject new dimensions and thus bring 'added-value' to current decision-making and policy-making processes relating to children and young people. By contrast, only 35% of respondents indicated that a legislative or other requirement is or would be a very significant reason for consulting children and young people. This finding should provide food for thought for relevant policy-makers as well as children's and young people's representative organisations, suggesting as it does that legislative or policy provisions alone are insufficient cause for organisations to involve children and young people in decision-making. In other words, it would appear that the National Children's Office, the impending Office of Ombudsman for Children and others with a role to play in promoting young voices will need to do more than reference the provisions of Goal One of the *National Children's Strategy* if they are to convince sceptics of the need to consult children and young people.

A number of respondents also added their own views on why children and young people should be consulted:

#### **Rationales for Consulting Children and Young People**

- "The new National Children's Strategy emphasises the importance of all organisations developing children's consultation mechanisms so that children have a voice in decisions, which affect their lives."
- "Part of the philosophy on which the Development Board is founded is the belief in the right of *all* people to have input into decisions which affect them, but also a belief that best policy and practice is developed through consultation and participation with *all* stakeholders."
- "Involvement and education in the processes and tools of consultation from an early age is an important provision for social participation in the future as well as a method of enabling young people to be aware of the value and power they have to effect both positive and negative change."
- "The role of an organisation planning policy for children becomes clearer for that organisation if they involve their service users, i.e. children, in the process."
- "As an organisation, we are keen to promote benefits of consulting children with young people as they are adults of tomorrow. Consultation with young people ensures that new policies being developed are 'young people' proofed!"
- "Benefits to the young people are probably immediate in terms of opportunity to discuss/raise issues and feeling valued. We have work to do in feeding back information so that there are mid-term benefits and the input of the consultation results in policy and strategies that will hopefully yield more long-term benefits".
- "We are a voluntary organisation with a largely democratic operational structure and a commitment to equality of access to guiding for all. The non-formal educational models employed thrive in a partnership environment where ownership and involvement on even minor decisions is invaluable. Apart from the information gained and the representative viewpoints accessed, the actual process itself enables members to discuss and prepare as well as anticipate their involvement in change etc. and to discover and reassert their value as citizens."

- “What has emerged from our experiences of the participation of children/young people is that effective participation has a number of elements, all of which must be in place. The young people need preparation and support which is non-directional, different groups need different approaches yet all must be treated with equal weight (major implications). Adults need as much, if not more support. This is a challenge especially when there is not a consensus among adults on complex issues.”
- “It is extremely important for young people to be involved in the decision making processes of all they do as this gives them a true sense of belonging and also leads to them taking ownership of their groups and their own lives. As well as young people being involved in the decision making process it is also important that their opinions are valued and taken on board and not just given as lip service.”

#### 4.2.5. Barriers to Consultation with Children and Young People

Survey recipients were asked to identify the key barriers that currently exist in Ireland with regard to consulting children and young people at the level of public policy development. The findings are presented in Table 7 below.

**Table 7**

Possible barriers to consulting children/young people in relation to public policy development

	V.S**	S.	N.S	Unsure	%	No.
Existing decision-making structures are not flexible enough to accommodate consultation with c/yp*	28	60	10	2	100	50
Lack of resources (e.g. funding, personnel) and time to devise, implement and evaluate consultation with c/yp in relation to public policy development	39	41	16	4	100	51
Unavailability of training courses and resource material to enable staff to consult with c/yp effectively	24	44	28	4	100	51
Lack of supports for children/young people	28	52	16	4	100	50
Lack of interest on the part of c/yp to become involved in public policy development	8	30	46	16	100	50
Adults do not think that c/yp can make a meaningful contribution to public policy development	17	48	29	6	100	48

\* c/yp= children/young people

\*\* V.S= very significant, S= significant, and N.S= not significant

It is significant that the main barrier to consultation with children and young people identified by respondents is lack of resources, where resources were defined as funding and personnel. The *National Children's Strategy* recognises that resources will need to be provided for the implementation of Goal One. However, the nature and amount of resources to be provided remains unclear. In light of the above finding, it is interesting to note that a number of public policy-makers interviewed for this study did not appear to regard the provision of resources, and in particular funding, as a key issue with regard to progressing the implementation of Goal One (see Chapter Five, section 5.3.). This difference of view suggests the need for further careful consideration by the National Children's Office on the precise nature and amount of resources that will be required.

To the extent that it suggests a willingness to reach out to children and young people, it is welcoming to find that respondents do not regard the possibility that children/young people may not be interested in being consulted as a significant barrier to consulting with them. On a less positive note, it ought to be highlighted that a number of respondents also believe that children/young people have no contribution to make to public policy development. Surprisingly, perhaps, more voluntary than statutory organisations held this view. One possible reason for this might be that voluntary organisations, having carried out more consultations with children and young people than statutory agencies in the past, may be experiencing ‘consultation fatigue’ or frustration at the lack of impact that such consultative work may have had.

A number of respondents added their own comments on existing barriers to consultation with children and young people:

#### **Barriers to Consultation with Children and Young People**

- “Rigid ideas on means of communication; public policy consultation is laden with jargon and offers little flexibility for marginalised groups.”
- “Many young Travellers lack access to services which may give them the opportunity to give/voice their opinions regarding policy developments.”
- “Institutions of governance are not prepared for the shift in their ways of working, to seek out and take account of the views and opinions of children/young people.”

As a final point, it is worth noting that many of the comments received relate to the particular difficulties faced by marginalised groups in overcoming barriers to consultation. This finding suggests that the commitment under Goal One of the Strategy to creating inclusive and equitable opportunities for children and young people to be consulted constitutes an additional challenge to policy-makers and practitioners alike.

### **4.3. To consult or not to consult? – Interview findings**

The policy-makers and practitioners interviewed for this study were invited to respond to two questions that sought to re-cast the broad question of whether or not children and young people should be consulted in a mould that is particularly germane to the theme of this study. The two questions asked were:

- Do you think that children and young people can make a meaningful contribution to public policy developments affecting them and thus that consulting them at this level of decision-making can be a worthwhile undertaking?
- Do you think that the practice of consulting socially excluded children and young people can be a function of social inclusion? If so, what role(s) do believe this work might play within a social inclusion agenda?

Interviewees’ responses to these questions are presented below.

#### **4.3.1. Can children and young people make a meaningful contribution to public policy?**

All interviewees believed children and young people could make a meaningful contribution to public policy development at national and local level. Significantly, all interviewees also argued that children and young people would need to be enabled to do so and that adults have a responsibility in this regard:

“It will be useful if you are prepared to make it useful ... The first step in the process of ... successful consultation is to think of it as a meaningful process ... If it’s done



properly, it does bring a dimension ... The work I've been involved in ... has made me convinced that it is worth doing." – *Public policy-maker at national level*

"Most public policy affects young people, so why wouldn't we consult with them? ... They can make a meaningful contribution if we can ask them questions in a meaningful way." – *Representative of the voluntary youth sector*

A number of interviewees also asserted that adults need to be equipped to ensure that the meaningfulness of that contribution is communicated and heard:

"Do I think that children and young people can make a meaningful contribution? The answer to that is yes, I do. But I would say to you very frankly that the presentation of that contribution is something that can't be taken for granted ... " – *Public policy-maker at national level*

"I think the difficulty ... for adults in general ... is that we too easily write them off ... So, I think there's some convincing we need to do ... We need to equip adults to take on board [that children and young people have a meaningful contribution to make]" – *Pavee Point representative*

When asked about the nature of the meaningful contribution that children and young people could make to public policy development, interviewees typically suggested that children and young people could provide new content and/or alternative perspectives. A number of interviewees conceptualised the usefulness of this perspective as affording an insight into 'childhood in the present tense'. In doing so, they echoed a view expressed by policy-makers and practitioners who were surveyed and by children and young people who participated in the focus group consultations.

### **What Children and Young People can bring to Public Policy Development**

- "I think the actual experience of it [being young and out of home] is the thing that can get lost. ... [Y]ou can miss the experience of what service-provision is if you don't listen to young people ... We often look at things in terms of ... generally meeting the needs of a group, but there are some young people within the services where what's generally available doesn't match." – *Practitioner working with young people out of home*
- "I do think ... that young people can give you the best insight into their own life ... If you can do it in a meaningful way, ... it can be useful. ... I think young people have a lot to offer." – *Pavee Point representative*
- "Children see childhood as something that they are living through now ... whereas ... adults ... want to ... lay down the foundation for the best chance in life. So, I think it's a perspective ... It adds colour and texture to your understanding of issues." – *Public policy-maker at national level*
- "I think it's probably a nuance or a perspective or a slightly different angle ... I don't think anybody can remember what it's like to see things through a child's eye. And not only remember. Times have changed. I think often the problem is that what we do is remember ... It's different times, different parents, ... totally different circumstances ... So, it's not enough to remember" – *Representative of the voluntary youth sector*
- "I have never failed to be amazed how they [children/young people] have always something that I hadn't thought of or that I didn't think was particularly relevant ... I just don't think that adults are ... attuned" – *Practitioner working with children and young people with physical disabilities*
- "Just the insight. Children think in such different ways to the way adults think ... [They think of] things that a lot of adults ... would never ever think about ... I think it would make a very real difference ... in terms of broadening the outlook that adults have." – *Community and Enterprise Development Officer with Local Authority*

### 4.3.2. Consultation with children and young people: A function of social inclusion?

All interviewees believed that consultation with socially excluded children and young people could be a function of social inclusion. When asked how such work might contribute to the social inclusion agenda, interviewees responded by saying that benefits might be reaped at a micro level and/or at a macro level:

- The experience of being consulted might be of personal benefit to the children and young people
- Policies being developed for them would be likely to improve through their input
- Services arising from these policies would be more likely to be used and respected by children and young people if children and young people had been involved in their planning.

It was interesting to note that practitioners working directly with children and young people experiencing poverty and/or other forms of social exclusion were more likely to point in the first instance to the benefits that individual children and young people might reap from the experience of being consulted. In referring to these benefits, interviewees reinforced a view that has been articulated in research with children and young people experiencing poverty and social exclusion, namely: these experiences can prompt feelings of shame in children and young people and can have a negative impact on their self-esteem.<sup>108</sup> Accordingly, interviewees hypothesised that the experience of being asked for their views might afford them the esteem-building experience of being valued. They also suggested that the experience of being consulted could be a valuable educational process that could improve children's and young people's skill-base in a variety of ways. In saying as much, several interviewees argued, however, that such benefits could only be accrued from their involvement in *meaningful* consultative processes. If done inappropriately (for example in a way that insisted on their status as socially excluded) or in a manner that was perceived by the children and young people as tokenistic, consultation might serve to exacerbate any existing feelings of being under-valued. A selection of comments that reflect these ideas are presented in the first of two sets of quotations presented below. The second set of quotations presents interviewees' views on how consultation with socially excluded children and young people might benefit Ireland's social inclusion policies and services.

#### Benefits to Children and Young People experiencing Social Exclusion

- "A lot of young people ... see their destiny [as being] outside their own control ... Any policy which is looking at the whole area of social inclusion ... need[s] to look at ... who's this policy aimed at and ... how's it going to impact on them? ... The young people themselves certainly [would benefit] ... And, indeed, the decisions ... If it's meaningful ... it can only have a positive impact ... It may actually drive them on to take an interest in ... [their] community ... and [to realise that] 'It's not outside our control'" - *Health Board practitioner*
- "Even at a services level, when you include young people in planning ... or whatever, it does empower them and makes them feel that ... they are more valued. And I think, as a group, for them to feel listened to in some way that's effective ... would be completely contrary to what their experiences are because ... most young people we would work with ... feel different and ... feel outside ... To give them their voice certainly would give them ... a sense of belonging to the greater mass of young people ... I don't think a lot of young people would like to see themselves identified as 'homeless' ... They do tend to get asked things about being out of home, about drug use, about prostitution, about crime ... They're the areas focused on because I think when people think 'homeless young people', that's what they see ... They're not used to 'What's it like being a young person?' as well as 'What's it like being out of home?' ... That piece ... is missed" - *Practitioner working with young people out of home*

<sup>108</sup> See, for example, Willow (2001). In this report, children and young people themselves speak of the shame and low self-esteem that has arisen from their experience of poverty and being identified by others as 'poor'.

- “It can be very enabling ... for people to [know] ‘Well, they’re listening to what I have to say’ ... I think it can be quite empowering for young people ... As a youth workers ... one of the underlying things is how you empower ... by involving young people ... in decision-making ... The smallest thing ... can be really beneficial ... if it’s done in that positive sense and ... within an overall programme of work” – *Pavee Point representative*
- “The feedback from the kids was that the thing they seemed to get most out of ... was just meeting kids from other parts of the country. And I think it’s a hugely valuable thing ... Not just to meet them, but to be saying ‘What’s going on in your area?’ ... to get that sense ... that they are a group ... part of this bigger, national thing called ‘young people.’” – *Public policy-maker at national level*
- “I’m just thinking, say if some of our young people were to be involved in some of the discussions that go on [at local level]. I would prefer to think that they would be there as young people, not as young people with a disability ... That view should be reflected, but ... I think that the inclusion piece and making it more real would be that ‘Yes, I’m part of that community.’” – *Practitioner working with children and young people with physical disabilities*
- “Part of the preparation is to make sure that kids who mightn’t feel comfortable are made to feel comfortable about the process because otherwise all you’re getting is the articulate kids that will get up again and again ... and if they’re the ones that take control of the situation it means that other voices are drowned out ... But you have to be subtle about it” – *Public policy-maker at national level*
- “It definitely has a role to play in social inclusion ... [However,] just consulting with socially excluded children ... is going to marginalise them more again ... Naming them and over-consulting them and building up their perceptions of themselves as being socially excluded ... [T]o have public bodies consulting with one group because and only because they’re socially excluded, I’m not sure is great. But maybe that’s just around how you do it. Of course it does have to be done as [part of] the social inclusion agenda.” – *Representative of the voluntary youth sector*

## Benefits to Social Inclusion Policies and Services

- “If things are given to people as a fait accompli, ... particularly teenagers, there’s always a reluctance to accept whereas if they’re involved in the ... process, there’s a buy-in ... If you get agreement and consensus, then you’ve a better chance of achieving the outcome you want out of whatever you’re trying to do ... in policy terms. So, I think there is a value in it. Definitely ... Sometimes there’s a gap between ... policy-makers and the local reality on the ground, particularly for disadvantaged people ... I see it all the time ... What people would be saying is ‘Oh, this formula would be the formula that we’ll put in place.’ It mightn’t be what’s needed at all.” – *Public policy-maker at national level*
- “I firmly believe that if young people have a say in something, they will utilise it ... afterwards and they will feel part of it ... By consulting young people, they [policy-makers] will be ... able to deliver better services, better amenities, better facilities.” – *Children’s consultation officer*
- “In terms of social inclusion ... there are significant items or elements of the overall framework which impact enormously on children ... Not just the issue of consistent poverty, which is important in itself, but also things like homelessness, drugs ... Those agendas affect young people. So, I think the answer to the question is yes ... that it does form part of the social inclusion agenda.” – *Public policy-maker at national level*
- “It would really enrich the work that we do to be able to hear what children have to say and to hear what they want and how they want it ... What we’re saying is that it is no longer sufficient just to get the view of adults who are unemployed in a household, that the unemployment, the income levels, the social exclusion experience by that household has a

major impact on the children. It's important to hear how the children experience that and what particular needs they have arising from it." – *Community and Enterprise Development Officer with a Local Authority*

- "A lot of the time when they're talking about the way things should be, they're ... really bang on ... I do think they've a huge amount to say ... Often you can put things in place that look like ... the best way to do it and you've a young person resisting and if you actually talk to them and ask them why they don't want it, there's a very clear and obvious reason why" – *Practitioner working with young people out of home*

#### **4.4. To consult or not to consult? – What children and young people say**

The first question asked of the 62 children and young people who participated in the focus groups for this study was: Do you think that children and young people should have a say when plans are being made that affect them?

In response, the overwhelming majority of children and young people – 57 participants – said 'Yes'. When asked to explain why they thought children and young people should have a say, participants gave a variety of reasons:

- The service/policy being planned is for children/young people
- Adults do not (necessarily) know what children and young people think and/or what children and young people like/want/need
- What children and young people have to say matters
- All people, including children and young people, should be treated equally
- The experience of being consulted is beneficial to children and young people
- Children and young people have a right to have a say
- Children and young people are the adults of the future and decisions taken about them now will affect them in future
- Children and young people are more likely to use and respect services provided for them if they have been involved in their creation
- Consulting children and young people will help to create services that benefit all children and young people.

Of these reasons, those given most frequently by participants were:

- The service/policy being planned is for children/young people
- Adults do not (necessarily) know what children and young people think and/or what children and young people like/want/need
- All people, including children and young people, should be treated equally
- Children and young people have a right to have a say.

A selection of the reasons given is presented in the children's and young people's own words below.

#### **Children and Young People should have a Say because ...**

- "Adults don't know what's going on in our heads"
- "What we say matters"
- "It's good to have the experience of being listened to"
- "Children should be part of making their own plans"
- "Because we're all equal"
- "Because it's for you. It's not for them"
- "Because adults are gone out of times"
- "It's my life and I've a say how to do it ... and to say yes or no, I don't want that to happen"
- "Something that's going to affect us ... it's not just going to affect us now ... it'll affect us in ... years to come. It's going to affect our lives then. And, like, we're going to be the adults"

of the future, so therefore ... they should ... Because adults and people like teenagers and children are totally different and, like, when ... adults were children it was different than we're living now"

- "If you don't have a voice ... you'd have your mouth open all the time, like that" (presents silent, gaping mouth)

Two participants, aged between 9 and 12 years, dissented from this near consensus on the grounds that children and young people lack the necessary knowledge and maturity. This was also the view of a participant who initially responded by saying: "I'm not sure".

#### **Children and Young People should not have a Say because ...**

- "We're not wise, ... not mature enough"
- "We're more likely to make wrong decisions"
- Children "will probably go overboard ... They might ask for too much ... Children are ... not mature enough"

A response to this latter viewpoint was indirectly afforded by a sixteen year old young woman who participated in another focus group. While affirming that children and young people should be consulted, she argued that children and young people would occasionally put forward far-fetched ideas. She suggested that adults should expect this to happen and, rather than dismissing such ideas out of hand, should consider whether they might be adapted in such a way as to be rendered practicable.

### **4.5. Implications**

Key implications and recommendations arising from the findings presented in this chapter are as follows:

- The creation of meaningful and sustainable opportunities for children and young people to be consulted will be facilitated by promoting rather than stifling debate on the question of whether or not children and young people should be consulted in relation to public policy development at national and local level.
- Those with responsibility for promoting consultation with children and young people will need to do more than reference national public policy provisions in this regard if policy-makers and professionals are to be convinced of the value of consulting children and young people. That survey recipients identified children's and young people's *right* to be heard as the principal 'very significant reason' for consulting them suggests that a rights-based approach should be taken to promoting consultation with children and young people.
- There is a need to assess and raise awareness levels, in particular among policy-makers, of the relevance of their remit to children and young people and thus of children and young people as a 'client' group that should be considered for inclusion in future consultative processes relating to public policy.
- Supports, in particular funding, training for future facilitators and good practice guidelines need to be provided if organisations are to implement consultation processes with children and young people.
- Children and young people, including those experiencing poverty or other forms of social exclusion, can make a meaningful contribution to public policy development, but they must receive the support that enables them to do so.

- If done in meaningful and appropriate ways, consultation with socially excluded children and young people could be a function of social inclusion at both the micro level of the individual and the macro level of public policy development and service provision.

# Chapter Five: Resource Issues

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## Introduction

That creating and sustaining opportunities for children and young people to be consulted have resource implications will come as no surprise. The aim of this chapter is to name key resource issues that need to be addressed in the context of implementing Goal One of the *National Children's Strategy*. Drawing on the literature review, the first section identifies and discusses these issues. Comprising the findings of the survey and interviews conducted for this study, the following two sections present the views and perspectives of current policy-makers and practitioners in Ireland on these issues: their conception of what the key resource issues are as well as the extent to which these issues and how they are addressed will determine the nature and number of opportunities that can be created for children and young people to be consulted in relation to public policy developments affecting them. The chapter concludes with implications and recommendations arising from the findings.

## 5.1. Resourcing Consultation - What the Literature says

Taken in the round, the literature reviewed for this study suggests that the principal resource issues that arise with regard to creating, developing and sustaining opportunities for children and young people to be consulted are:

- Finance and funding
- Time and personnel
- Training to facilitate consultation
- Supporting children and young people to be consulted.

### 5.1.2. Finance and funding

To the extent that amounts and conditions of funding necessarily play a pivotal role in determining the scope, quality and sustainability of any consultative initiative involving children and young people, finance and funding are make-or-break issues. There are many aspects of a given consultation with children and young people that can be seen to have potential cost implications. These include:

- Insurance (protection against liability)
- Location (venue hire and/or transport to and from the venue)
- Refreshments
- Methodology (materials)
- Payment or payment in kind for organisers, facilitators, supervisors and/or assistants
- Payment or tokens of appreciation for participating children/young people
- Child care
- Communication and printing costs associated with the planning, implementation, feedback and evaluation stages.

In many of these areas, however, costs can be minimised or eliminated – for example:

- **Insurance** – These costs can be reduced or avoided by:
  - Holding the consultative process or event in a venue attended by participating children and young people on a regular or daily basis (for example, children's and young people's schools; youth clubs);
  - Ensuring that signed consent forms have been received from the parents/guardians/carers of participants in advance of the consultation;
  - Using sufficient numbers of and known/vetted facilitators, supervisors and assistants.

- **Venue hire and/or transport costs** – These costs can be avoided by conducting the consultation:
  - In a venue that is close to where participating children and young people live;
  - At a time when participating children and young people would normally be at a particular venue anyway (e.g. school, youth club or equivalent, after school club).
- **Refreshments** – Receiving ‘tasty’ refreshments is recognised by children and young people as being part of what makes for an enjoyable experience of consultation. The cost implications will depend on:
  - The duration of the consultation (whether, for example, snacks and/or lunch and/or more than this (in the case of residential) are required);
  - The numbers of participants.
- **Methodologies** – It can be, but will not always be, appropriate to use methodologies that have no or minimal cost implications – for example, interview/group discussion. In addition, and depending on who is involved in organising and/or assisting with the consultative process and on where the consultation is taking place, materials may be already available for use – for example, if the consultation is being undertaken with and in a school, the school may permit the use of its existing art materials.
- **Payment or payment in kind to organisers, facilitators, supervisors and assistants** – Costs in this area can be minimised or eliminated if, for example:
  - The individuals performing these roles are existing staff members who include this work among their existing responsibilities or are willing to undertake it in a voluntary capacity;
  - The individuals performing one or more of these roles are volunteers.
- **Payment or payment in kind for children/young people** – The literature reveals differences of opinion on whether children and young people should be remunerated for their participation in a consultative process.<sup>109</sup> Those who propose remuneration do so for different reasons. Some argue that consulting children/young people entails an implicit or explicit recognition of them as experts or quasi-consultants and that they should be remunerated as such. It has also been suggested that remuneration can act as an incentive and/or a sign of appreciation to children/young people, especially when they are giving of their free time to participate in a consultation. Those opposing remuneration of children/young people argue that children/young people do not expect remuneration and/or that it could be perceived as manipulative and/or that it undermines the spirit of voluntarism that should inform children’s and young people’s decision to become involved in a consultation. The researchers would suggest that it will be desirable for a common approach to be agreed and adopted by policy-makers and practitioners involved in this area of work in future. In determining what approach to take, policy-makers and practitioners might like to bear in mind that remuneration of individuals for their involvement in community development consultations, for example, is very unusual in the Irish context. Payment in kind is another matter, whereby it is not unusual for organisations to offer tokens of appreciation to children and young people. These can take different forms – for example, prizes/spot prizes and/or tokens of appreciation for each participating child/young person. These need not be expensive – for example, certificates are commonly used (e.g. ISPCF fora, IFCW World Forum, 2001).
- **Child care** – Child care costs of adults and/or young people involved in a given consultation may be avoided depending on the time and venue for the consultation.
- **Communication costs** – Associated communication costs are unavoidable, but can be minimised. Necessary printed matter, for example, can be effective without being lavish.

The above examples pertain to cost areas that arise in relation to consultation with children and young people in the round. The matter of finance and funding can have a particular

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<sup>109</sup> See, for example, White, P., *Local and Vocal: Promoting young people’s involvement in local decision-making. An overview and planning guide* (London: Save the Children/National Youth Agency, 2000/2001), p. 32 and Ward, L., *Seen and heard: Involving disabled children and young people in research and development projects* (York: YPS for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 1997), p. 10f.



bearing on the involvement in consultative processes of children and young people experiencing or at risk of poverty or other forms of social exclusion. This is because some of the additional supports they may require to facilitate their access to and meaningful involvement have cost implications. For example:

- Where non-English speaking children and young people are to be consulted, interpreters are likely to be required
- Where children and young people whose principal mode of communication is sign language are to be consulted, signers may be required
- Where children and young with literacy difficulties or children and young people who cannot express themselves freely orally are to be consulted, other and potentially more costly methods than writing and speaking will need to be used
- Where children and young people require a package of techniques and technologies to enable them to communicate effectively, these will need to be used to facilitate their involvement
- Where a child's or young person's mode of communication is such that his/her carer is best placed to understand and communicate the child's or young person's ideas on their behalf, both child/young person and carer will need to be included in the process.

While it may also be possible to reduce or eliminate costs in these areas, the very existence of these additional cost areas means that there is a danger that children and young people who are already socially excluded or most at risk of social exclusion are the very children and young people who are most likely to be excluded on financial grounds from participating in consultative processes relating to public policy initiatives affecting children and young people in the round. To curtail the potential exclusion of these children and young people on financial grounds, the researchers would suggest that:

- Relevant statutory organisations and NGOs planning to consult children and young people draw up and disseminate an inclusion policy or equivalent as part of their preparations for embarking on this work;
- Statutory organisations and NGOs already consulting children and young people evaluate the inclusiveness of this work and make any necessary adjustments to ensure a more equitable and inclusive approach in future;
- All organisations conducting consultations with children and young people in future evaluate this work and make inclusion one aspect of their evaluations.

Inextricable from the matter of finance is the question of funding. From the literature reviewed, there appear to be two principal sources of funding for initiatives aiming to hear young voices: statutory funding and funding from independent charitable foundations. Perhaps the key point to have emerged in relation to funding is that the creation of sustainable opportunities for children and young people to be consulted, including in relation to public policy development, requires a commitment on the part of funding bodies to support initiatives in the medium- to long-term. In addition, conditions of funding should be such that the unpredictability that can be part-and-parcel of consultative work with children and young people is taken into account. In this regard, we would suggest that organisations seeking funding seek to clarify in their applications the nature and degree of the 'risk factor' associated with the particular consultative initiative they are seeking funding for. Just such an assessment was offered by one interviewee for this study. As she indirectly suggested, identifying the 'risk factor' should not undermine the validity of a funding proposal since the attempt to negotiate it will be a valuable source of learning regardless of whether the envisaged outcomes are achieved:

*"You couldn't just set a time and an agenda ... With this group of young people [young people out of home] it won't work like that. And it shouldn't be expected to because I think part-and-parcel of the whole process of consulting them ... should highlight the difficulties that arise in it. I don't think that's a failure by any means. It's a start ... But it definitely won't go according to plan!" – Practitioner working with young people out of home*

Finally, we would suggest that funding bodies and those seeking funds will benefit from the creation and dissemination of information on the cost areas associated with consultative work with children and young people. Such information will facilitate the development of accurate budget outlines for proposed initiatives and the corresponding provision of adequate funding for these initiatives.

### **5.1.2. Time and Personnel**

Planning, implementing and evaluating consultative work with children and young people in relation to public policy development is a time-consuming endeavour.<sup>110</sup> While the amount of time required will depend on a variety of factors (amount of previous experience and corresponding skill base in this area; scale of the consultation; diversity of participants in the consultation; etc.), the literature and the experience of the focus groups conducted for this study suggest that the following rule of thumb be applied: if in doubt, overestimate the time needed. The focus group consultations with children and young people conducted for the purposes of this study confirm this. Above all, this experience has emphasised the importance of factoring in 'time lag'. By this is meant the time that elapses between a particular action and a follow-up action – for example, between making contact with a group of children/young people and the first available opportunity to meet with them. 'Time lag' is likely to be greater in cases where those undertaking the consultation process are not already working with children and young people directly. As such, 'time lag' is a likely issue to arise where policy-makers at national or local level are seeking to consult with children and young people and, in particular, where they are seeking to do so for the first time. In cases where children and young people will be one of several groups to be consulted in relation to a particular public policy initiative, policy-makers are advised to accommodate this factor by devising a flexible timeframe and embarking on the consultation with children and young people in advance of consulting other relevant stakeholders.

Another significant consideration in relation to time is the time allocation to each of the different stages of a consultative process. Once again, a general rule of thumb that is likely to apply in most cases is the allocation of equal time to the planning, implementation and feedback/evaluation stages. Furthermore, the focus group consultations with children and young people undertaken for this study have served to reinforce the importance of allocating at least one third of the time available to the planning stage: from the perspective of the researcher responsible for these consultations, their success was due in no small measure to the time invested in their planning on the part of all concerned. The centrality of allocating sufficient time for planning is also stated in the literature – for example, recently published guidelines for Scottish Parliamentary Committees on improving consultation with children/young people in policy-making and legislation in Scotland identified "forward planning" as "the secret to success".<sup>111</sup>

The question of personnel allocation to facilitate the creation and development of opportunities for children and young people to be consulted is inextricable from the time issue. The time required to conduct consultative processes can be disproportionately greater than the time available to staff members in light of their existing responsibilities. The issue of personnel is likely to be more pronounced in the case of large scale consultations and will certainly require consideration if consultation with children and young people is to become structurally embedded as part-and-parcel of decision-making relating to public policy developments affecting them.

There are a number of possible responses to the personnel issue:

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<sup>110</sup> See, for example, White (2000/2001), p. 31.

<sup>111</sup> Borland, M., Hill, M., Laybourn, A. and Stafford, A., 'Improving Consultation with Children and Young People in Relevant Aspects of Policy-Making and Legislation in Scotland: Guidelines for Scottish Parliamentary Committees', *Scottish Parliament Paper 365, Session 1 (2001)* (Edinburgh: The Stationery Office Ltd., 2001), p. 2.

- **Appointment of an additional member of staff on a full-time, part-time or occasional basis** – Having already embarked on its Consultation with Young People on Physical Punishment in the Home, the Office of Law Reform, for example, recruited an individual on a short-term contract to manage the completion of this consultative process.
- **Involve volunteers** – The ISPCC, for example, involve volunteers in their children’s fora while NGOs that enabled children and young people to contribute their observations and viewpoints to the preparation of the National Children’s Strategy took on this role in a voluntary capacity.
- **Integrate this role as part of the job description for existing relevant statutory or non-statutory positions** – This approach is most likely to facilitate the creation of a culture where consultation with children and young people is structurally embedded in decision-making processes relating to relevant public policy developments. In some cases, this role is already part-and-parcel of existing professions – for example, youth work. In the case of others, the scope for integrating this role will need to be negotiated with professionals and/or their representatives. While recent curriculum developments at primary and post-primary level (SPHE, CSPE, etc.) would suggest that teachers, for example, might integrate consultation with children and young people in relation to public policy development into their citizenship programmes, a question arises as to whether this will be feasible in light of a commonly held view that teachers are already confronted with an over-loaded curriculum. If avenues such as this are to be explored, then consideration will need to be given to whether and to what extent it will be necessary to provide staff cover at those times when consultations with children and young people are taking place.

### 5.1.3. Training to facilitate consultation

It is increasingly being recognised that the use of trained facilitators in consultative work with children and young people is key to ensuring that children and young people can contribute to the best of their ability and hence that meaningful outcomes are produced for all concerned. Save the Children and the Children’s Law Centre, for example, provided training to thirty people so as to enable them to consult children and young people with whom they *already* work about their views and ideas for Northern Ireland’s *Bill of Rights*. In other words, it was assumed neither by these NGOs nor by the professionals they trained that existing experience of working with children and young people directly was sufficient to enable them to undertake quasi-formal consultative work with these children and young people. The researchers would suggest that where it is planned to seek the involvement of professionals who already work directly with children and young people (for example, child care workers, teachers and youth workers), it will be desirable to make training available to these professionals and not only to those who do not already work with children and young people directly. Different levels of existing expertise and experience should also be reflected in the development of training programmes – for example, in light of their existing training, qualified youth workers will require significantly less additional training than public servants at national or local level who may be called upon in future to organise, facilitate, supervise or assist with consultations with children and young people. Since a ‘one size fits all’ training programme will not be sufficient, the recently established Children’s Consultation Unit,<sup>112</sup> for example, should receive the resources it requires to design, develop and deliver training programmes tailored to different levels of experience and expertise. An additional factor that warrants consideration is whether and, if so, to what extent it may prove desirable to provide training on matters other than facilitating consultation with children and young people. Depending on who it is envisaged might perform this role, it may be desirable in some cases to provide training that enhances future facilitators’ understanding of the experiences and abilities of children and young people who are experiencing or most at risk of social exclusion – for example, issues and attitudes around disability, Traveller culture, multiculturalism and youth homelessness.

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<sup>112</sup> As noted in Chapter One, this training unit has been established by the ISPCC and is to be funded by the National Children’s Office to support the implementation of Goal One of the National Children’s Strategy.

#### 5.1.4. Supporting children and young people to be consulted

From the survey and interviews conducted for this study it would appear that there is an existing awareness among relevant policy-makers and professionals of the need to support children and young people to make an informed and meaningful contribution to public policy developments affecting them at national and local level. This support takes many forms. The choice of facilitators, levels of supervision and assistance, methodologies, settings, all have a role to play in ensuring that children and young people feel supported to make their contributions. However, what is meant by support in this context is the provision of information and preparation to children and young people. The amount of both required and the formats/manner in which they are provided will necessarily vary and depend to a considerable degree on the age, experience and capacities of a particular child/young person or group of children/young people. The key point is that the time and resources required to support children's and young people's involvement are taken into account during the planning stages and accommodated in the design of any consultative process with children and young people. In the short-term and in relation to specific consultative initiatives, targeted support is needed in the form of discreet preparatory work with the specific groups of children and young people whose involvement is being sought. Taking a longer term view, it is suggested that the process of structurally embedding consultation with children and young people in the public policy development process will benefit from maximising the potential of existing opportunities within the formal and non-formal education sectors to furnish children and young people with:

- A knowledge of key issues affecting children and young people
- An understanding of citizenship and Ireland's structures of governance
- The skills that are part-and-parcel of effective involvement.

As Miller and others have suggested, this work can begin at an early age and within early childhood education settings. Young children can be enabled to learn in participatory ways about taking responsibility and making decisions as part of existing teaching and learning and, moreover, to contribute to the development of plans that affect them.<sup>113</sup>

## 5.2. Resourcing Consultation: Survey findings

A number of questions posed in the survey pertained to resource issues. The findings of two of these questions have already been presented in Chapter Four, but merit representation here.

The first question requested organisations which had indicated that they do not currently consult with children and young people to say why they do not. Several organisations pointed directly or indirectly to the resource issues discussed above. In doing so, respondents underscored the significance of these issues in determining whether or not consultation with children/young people takes place and the need for adequate resources to be provided:

- The majority of responding organisations (10%) that do not consult with children and young people pointed to the absence of structures or guidelines to facilitate such consultative work.
- 7% of responding organisations do not consult with children and young people because they do not have the resources (personnel, funding, etc.) to do so.
- 5% of responding organisations said that they do not consult because they do not have trained personnel to undertake consultation with children and young people.
- 2% of responding organisations said that they do not consult because children and young people do not have the skills needed for decision-making/policy-making.

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<sup>113</sup> See Miller, J., *Never too Young: How young children can take responsibility and make decisions. A handbook for early years workers* (London: Save the Children/The National Early Years Network, 1996); Clark, A. and Moss, P., *Listening to Young Children: The Mosaic Approach* (London: National Children's Bureau, 2001); and Save the Children, UK, *Children's Participation Pack: A Practical Guide for Playworkers* (London: Save the Children, 1996).

A second question asked of survey recipients related to key barriers to consulting children/young people at the level of public policy development in Ireland. The findings of this question reveal that the resource issues discussed in the previous section are or are perceived as being very significant or significant barriers to consultation with children and young people:

- The main barrier to consultation with children and young people identified by respondents was lack of resources (funding, personnel) and time, with 39% of responding organisations identifying these as very significant barriers and 41% as significant barriers.
- The unavailability of training courses and resource materials to enable staff to consult with children and young people effectively was identified as a very significant barrier by 24% of respondents and as a significant barrier by 44% of respondents.
- Over half of respondents (52%) identified lack of supports for children/young people as a significant barrier, with 28% of respondents identifying this barrier as very significant.

Several respondents subsequently identified the provision of adequate resources as key to overcoming existing barriers and/or made suggestions in this regard that can be seen to have resource implications:

#### **Resources required to overcome Barriers to consulting Children and Young People**

- "Availability of training, resources and funding."
- "Dedicated funding for the area of consultation with children, and provision of training for adults in relation to consultation with children."
- "Developing awareness raising sessions among adults detailing the benefits [of] consulting with young people. Awareness raising around the difference between participation and tokenism and how young people become alienated due to [attitude] difficulties among adults."
- "1) Development of Community-based Citizenship programmes. 2) Establishment of a few pilot programmes, in a variety of geographical and socio-economic environments, around co-operative ventures involving young people and adult community leaders ... 4) Expansion of the local 'Dáil na nÓg' initiative and development of opportunities for this to contribute to decision-making on issues which affect children/young people either directly or indirectly."
- "Resources need to be made available to develop consultation processes that are both relevant and interesting to young people and that involve responses/feedback to those involved."
- "By providing 'Best Practice' models of existing projects at conferences/workshops and by providing resources and incentives to young people/groups to engage in meaningful consultation."
- "The starting point is to get staff on board and assist them in an appreciation of the need to consult with young people."

Resource issues were also named by respondents in response to an open question in the survey concerning the principal measures needed to further develop the number and quality of opportunities for children and young people (in particular children and young people experiencing poverty or other forms of social exclusion) to be consulted in relation to public policy developments affecting them:

## Resourcing Consultation with Children and Young People

- “- Awareness programmes for adults working in public policy for children.
  - Innovative methods of consultation to be developed that might suit children (and others).
  - Training for interviewers, policy makers, to grab interest and retain.
  - Provision of a forum for children to bring issues to, in an informal setting.
  - Break down barriers of isolation, involve children from non excluded backgrounds/ not at risk in consultation.
  - Advocacy training for children.”
- “There needs to be a national plan of consultation which is consistent and includes a mechanism for feedback on young people's input to consultation; this should also include a monitoring process to ensure effectiveness. There needs to be an anti-racist policy in place to ensure ethnic minorities, including Travellers, are included and are aware of the difference that may arise. Also those conducting consultations with minorities need to be aware of how they interpret what those from different cultures than their own may be saying. We need adequate resources in place to ensure that organisations can include consultation processes with young people in an appropriate and relevant way.”
- “1) Providing greater resources (financial, training, capacity building etc.) at a community level for work with children and young people. 2) Development of demonstration projects as models of good practice. 3) Identifying areas within the county where there is a poor level of support for children and young people's activities and providing resources to build capacity in these areas.”
- “- Professional and adequately funded supports that promote the concept and build capacity at local, regional and national levels to undertake participation/consultation exercises.
  - Range of accessible 'educational' and practical materials that can assist above.
  - A commitment to 'outreach' to children and young people experiencing poverty and/or living in disadvantaged areas
  - Linking with community development structures at local and national level.”
- “Socially excluded groups, by their very nature, have been outside the decision-making and policy-development processes. Young people from these backgrounds are merely a subset of an already marginalised grouping. For young people's voices to be properly heard, it is vital that there are structures in place, whereby all socially excluded groups have equal opportunities of making their contributions.”

Finally, respondents were invited to provide information on sources of funding that they have received to facilitate consultation with children/young people in decision-making/policy-making that affects them. From those that chose to respond, it would appear that there has been and continues to be a lack of mainstream funding for consultative work with children and young people. Respondents' comments also suggest that Health Boards are more likely to allocate funding to facilitate consultation and that many voluntary organisations currently receive statutory funding to carry out consultations with children/young people.

In light of these findings, and as was suggested in Chapter Four, policy-makers charged with progressing work in this area, including implementation of Goal One of the *National Children's Strategy*, might be advised to give careful consideration to the nature and amount of resources required as well as to the funding structures and commitments needed to support organisations in the creation and/or development of opportunities for children and young people to be consulted in relation to public policy development.

### 5.3. Resourcing Consultation – Interview findings

Interviewees were invited to respond to three questions relating to resource issues:

- What do you consider to be the key resource implications of creating and sustaining opportunities for consulting children and young people in relation to public policy developments at national, regional and/or local level? (In this context, ‘resource implications’ might mean financial costs, time, personnel, etc.)
- If you or the organisation you work for has previously consulted or is currently consulting children and young people, how has this work been funded?
- By whom do you anticipate that future consultative work with children and young people in relation to public policy developments at national, regional and/or local level might be funded?

Interviewees consistently identified the following as key resource issues, thereby reinforcing the findings of both the literature review and the survey undertaken for this study:

- Finance (cost areas) and funding
- Time
- Personnel
- Training to facilitate consultation
- Supporting children and young people to be consulted.

However, as the comments presented below indicate,<sup>114</sup> there was some variation in the amount of emphasis placed by interviewees on each of these resource issues. In this regard, it is interesting to note that policy-makers were inclined to argue that the costs associated with undertaking consultation with children and young people should *not* be viewed as a barrier to progressing work in this area. This tendency is notable given the survey findings, where most organisations identified lack of funds as a key reason for not having consulted with children and young people to date and/or as a key barrier to progressing work in this area. Another noteworthy trend was that practitioners working directly with children and young people tended to be more emphatic when speaking of the resource issues of time and personnel. As can be seen from the comments below, interviewees also had different ideas on how some of these issues might best be responded to. With regard to the issue of personnel, for example, some felt that it would be most beneficial to appoint additional staff on a full-time, part-time or occasional basis while others suggested that facilitating consultation with children and young people in one or more ways could or should be integrated into the responsibilities of relevant existing staff members and/or professions.

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<sup>114</sup> With regard to the presentation of interviewees’ comments on resource implications, the following should be noted:

- Under finance, various cost areas identified by interviewees are noted. However, it should not be taken from this that these are the only cost areas. As some interviewees’ comments suggest, the other resource issues presented have cost implications.
- Interviewees’ comments on funding are presented in section 5.3.2. below.

## Finance (cost areas)

### General

- "... as far as statutory agencies [are concerned], ... I think they need to bring that level of commitment to this. If you're not prepared to do anything unless you're getting paid for it, well then forget it ... [E]very time you change your work practice, you don't come looking for money" – *Public policy-maker at national level*
- "I don't think time or money should be a big deal as long as we can bring people along ... If it can be built into the ethos of the organisation, then the time will be made and the money will be made available ... I think there is sometimes very legitimate resource implications that do have to be taken on board, but I think a lot of the time it's used as a blocking mechanism" – *Community and Enterprise Development Officer with a Local Authority*

### Coordinating Consultation

- "I think there's an overall coordination role to be played ... [so] it's not just bits and pieces here and there ... I think young people would engage much better [then]" – *Pavee Point representative*
- "You have to make that decision as to how you structure the ... consultation process and that in itself is highly resource intensive ... And it's not just in terms of ... money ... I think it is possible to envisage a situation where that actually would be structured, but it would require someone to take a lead role in managing the agenda" – *Public policy-maker at national level*

### Insurance

- "We took out Public Liability Insurance for the event ... [Certainly] Public Liability Insurance" – *Public policy-maker at national level* (re: holding large consultation events in venues not usually attended by children/young people)

### Transport

- "Issues like transport ... Getting them to and from ... is pretty time-consuming" – *Health Board practitioner*
- "They [young people] were given ... travel expenses" – *Public policy-maker at national level*

### Methodologies

- "Obviously, very simple things [to think about], ... the cost of materials that are attached to it" – *Practitioner working with children and young people with physical disabilities*
- "You might need a budget line to be able to buy art materials or whatever to do the consultation work" – *Community and Enterprise Development Officer with a Local Authority*

### Incentives/Rewards for children and young people

- "If you're asking young people to volunteer their time, ... is there anything they can get out of it? ... Something for their c.v. or something like that? ... If a young person going for a job ... [can say] 'I've been involved in a consultation', that's very good ... Things like that ... have resource implications" – *Health Board practitioner*
- "If young people are going to be involved at ... [local] level, ... should there be some reward or compensation for that for them?" – *Practitioner working with children and young people with physical disabilities*

### Venue and Refreshments

- "You have to make it attractive in some way for them ... Even things like providing lunch" – *Health Board practitioner*
- "... you're talking about ... a venue .. You gotta feed them ... Practical household things just need to be taken into account" – *Public policy-maker at national level*



## Time

- “Time is a major factor ... To plan any sort of consultation takes a serious amount of time” – *Health Board practitioner*
- “Time is the other piece ... That’s why I think it needs to be dedicated people to do it because the people on the ground are operating the services, ... day-to-day stuff just takes over and it will get put on the back burner” – *Practitioner working with young people out of home*
- “It takes significantly longer than consulting with any other group ... That has implications” – *Representative of the voluntary youth sector*
- “When we were asked to do the consultation with the adolescents, it was the question of the time involved for planning it, preparing it ... and then the actual running of it ... A group of able-bodied young people may well have gone through the same stuff in two hours, but it would have taken us four ... It’s a job in itself ... [I]t’s not something that ... you can just do ... in your day-to-day work” – *Practitioner working with children and young people with physical disabilities*
- “I don’t think time ... should be a big deal as long as we can bring people along ... If it can be built into the ethos of an organisation, the time will be made” – *Community and Enterprise Development Officer with a Local Authority*

## Personnel

- “I do think it definitely needs to be somebody whose focus it is because people are just too busy really to be doing it as well as what they’re doing themselves [anyway]” – *Practitioner working with young people out of home*
- “Nothing kills something off as much as saying ‘We’ve got to fund somebody to do it’ because the money isn’t there ... My advice ... is to say ‘We have supports that will help you to do it, particularly around facilitation. There are people you may have to pay to come in and do it.’ ... I think you need to say ‘You do need specialist help and that is there. But this is something you should be doing as part of the way you do your business and you get on and do it’ ... It’s important ... that people see this as part of what they do [rather than as] ... part of what they have to get somebody else to do” – *Public policy-maker at national level*
- “I think staffing ... Any of our strategies just plummeted when the staff person was taken off it ... The reality is that if you take staffing support away, it won’t work ... Staffing and an organisational policy or ethos around it are crucial. And I think that ethos and policy will only come about through staffing” – *Representative of the voluntary youth sector*
- “It’s a job in itself ... The Health Board, for example, who ... pay for most of us here, would ... have to acknowledge that ... issue of staffing ... It’s not something that ... you can just do ... in your day-to-day work” – *Practitioner working with children and young people with physical disabilities*
- “I would stress very heavily [that] the human skills capability on this issue ... is very high and the people with the type of skills are at a premium ... I think there are huge resource implications ... in terms of the ability of people to manage this agenda” – *Public policy-maker at national level*
- “I think that where you start off by ... giving an additional staff member, it becomes segregated, the lessons don’t get learned within the organisation. It’s always seen as an add-on rather than a core part of the organisation’s work. And that is dangerous” – *Community and Enterprise Development Officer with a Local Authority.*

### Training to be involved in and/or facilitate consultation

- “To facilitate a group of young people is a specific skill ... There are implications there for who you’re going to get to do it. Do they need training?” – *Health Board practitioner*
- “... you need highly skilled people ... Money needs to go into getting people skilled up to do the work” – *Practitioner working with young people out of home*
- “I think the first step given where we’re at is the capacity to develop expertise to support others who want to do it. So, it’s resource materials, it’s ... a knowledge base, people who know how this works that ... can go out and talk to people and say ‘This is how you do it’” – *Public policy-maker at national level*
- “I think education is the key ... offering support, training and advice for ... organisations who are going to consider consulting with young people” – *Children’s consultation officer*
- “Training is a finance issue ... And training not only for the staff person that’s dealing with it” – *Representative from the voluntary youth sector*
- “There’s an issue then about training and skilling people to do it over the short to medium term ... [A] consultation process ... takes a lot of skill” – *Public policy-maker at national level*
- “From the point of view of the adults making policy ... there has to be training on how to consult ... I think that ... certainly within a Local Authority ... one person in each section should be trained. Same in all of the different agencies ... The expertise ... has to be spread throughout the organisation” – *Community and Enterprise Development Officer with a Local Authority*

### Supporting children and young people to be consulted

- “They need training ... basic skills ... even committee skills ... training which would focus on ... personal development” – *Health Board practitioner*
- “... you need training for young people” – *Practitioner working with young people out of home*
- “I think that young people will need to be supported ... I think it’s training ... They need a lot of nurturing and work, over years in some cases, to be able to work on committees, to know ... how the process [works], to know how you make your input” – *Public policy-maker at national level*
- “Certainly there’s a whole range of issues around ... preparation of young people to participate ... [P]reparation work is essential to help young people think through issues” – *Public policy-maker at national level*
- “Ensuring that the children are well informed beforehand” – *Children’s consultation officer*
- “Young people ... do need support. ... [T]raining through the process with young people” – *Representative from the voluntary youth sector*
- “In the longer term ... young people need to be encouraged to speak up and to be confident in that setting ... That’s a preparation piece that needs to be done” – *Practitioner working with children and young people with physical disabilities*

### Sources of existing and future funding

Interviewees whose organisations have experience of consulting children and young people were asked to disclose how this work has been funded. Interviewees’ responses were largely similar to those provided by organisations that responded to a similar question in the survey. While funding sources varied (Health Board, statutory funding, funding generated through

charitable donations from the public, sponsorship from private/public companies), the key point arising from the information provided is the absence of mainstream funding for this work. It would appear that funding is typically allocated on an ad hoc and piecemeal basis to specific consultation projects or events and that this funding either comes from within broader existing budgets or arises from a request having been made for funds to undertake a specific consultation project or event.

If these survey and interview findings are reflective of the general funding situation in relation to consultative work with children and young people in Ireland until now, then interviewees' responses to the question of how they would anticipate future consultation with children and young people in relation to public policy development to be funded are especially noteworthy. Their responses entail an expectation or aspiration that there will be a sea change in approaches to funding this kind of work, namely that it will or ought to become mainstreamed. The following points are noteworthy as regards interviewees' conceptions of how this sea change might be effected:

- The majority of interviewees anticipated and/or posited the need for a centralised approach to funding the development of this work at national and/or local level. In doing so, several interviewees vested responsibility for funding opportunities in statutory bodies, notably parent Government Departments and the new structures created under the National Children's Strategy, in particular the National Children's Office.
- Several of the practitioners and/or NGO representatives interviewed expected that funding would or should be made available through these sources in light of Goal One of the Strategy. Conversely, public policy-makers were more inclined to suggest that funds would or should be diverted for this work from within existing budgets.
- Another point of contrast between public policy-makers and NGO practitioners was their conception of whether the availability of funding or the creation of opportunities for children/young people to be consulted was the horse or, alternatively, the cart. Policy-makers were more inclined to argue, with reference to structurally embedding children and young people's voices in public policy development, that the creation of opportunities would prompt a release or allocation of funds. NGO practitioners, however, tended to see availability of funds as a prerequisite for the creation of opportunities for children and young people to be consulted. In light of these contrasting perspectives, there is a need for agreement to be reached on how, when and by whom consultation with children and young people in relation to public policy development will be funded.
- Only one interviewee spoke directly to the need for funding to facilitate the creation of *sustainable* opportunities for children and young people to be consulted. However, many interviewees might be seen to speak indirectly to the issue of sustainability in terms of how they characterised future funding and/or future opportunities.

### **Funding Consultation with Children and Young People**

- "You need to look at sustaining investment ... You need to look at commitment at some level ... No less than five years, I would say ... There were projects that sprung up all over the place and they got a year's funding and were pulled ... Disaster! ... You try to develop something and then you pull out. You do more harm than good ... Five years ... to evaluate ... [and] give a bit of leeway" – *Health Board practitioner*
- "From within the National Children's Strategy they've spoken about the need to get young people to participate so ... the National Children's Office ... I would see as something that would drive that initiative and ... fund it ... I do think there is more focus on the idea of listening to children, so I'd presume they have somewhere built in that somebody's going to have to pay for it" – *Practitioner working with young people out of home*
- "The Government has a key role to play in light of the National Children's Strategy. The National Children's Office should coordinate the resource issue at national level. Decisions

on implementation could be made locally” – *Pavee Point representative*

- “I presume that if ... [consultation] is built in as an integral part of the process, ... [it will be] funded through the Departments ... Have it as a fundamental part of any policy development process and then the resources will flow” – *Public policy-maker at national level*
- “I think this has to be seen as part of normal business. If you see it as part of your normal business, it goes into part of your budget anyway ... Now there may be an issue for small [organisations] ... Most of the voluntary agencies ... have reasonable budgets and, if they don’t ... then I think they need to look at whoever their core funders might be and make a case. But certainly as far as statutory agencies [are concerned] ... I think they need to bring that level of commitment to this” – *Public policy-maker at national level*
- “You’d like to see it ... being Government funded” – *Children’s consultation officer*
- “I do think it’s about prioritising mainstream funding ... It needs to be cross-departmental ... and then, within that, Departments need to put resources aside” – *Representative of voluntary youth sector*
- “... the Department of Education should have funding for consultation [on educational issues]. The Department of Health or the Health Boards should have funding for the consultation piece [on health issues]” – *Practitioner working with children and young people with physical disabilities*
- “I think that within the overall institutional structure, there are ways of providing for a structural consultation and then ... putting in the resources behind that” – *Public policy-maker at national level*
- “I just think it could be done from internal resources ... I think it’s fair enough to ask people to match funds if funding was being made available centrally. I think people need to be able to pay something in to take ownership of it ... So, I think not all funding should come from national level. There should be a match-funding requirement” – *Community and Enterprise Development Officer with a Local Authority*

In responding to the question of how future consultative work with children and young people might be funded, several interviewees addressed the question of whether consultation with them should become a funding requirement. With one exception, those who spoke to this issue suggested that such a stipulation could help to progress the creation and development of opportunities for children and young people to be consulted. However, as the comments below indicate, there were differing views on when such a stipulation might be introduced and on what form it should take.

### **Making Consultation with Children and Young People a Requirement of Funding**

- “Further down the line, if there’s an overall infrastructure which makes it easier for people to engage with it, then I think we can ... put it down as a stipulation for people. And if it puts people off, then maybe they’re not the people who are meant to be doing it in the first place” – *Pavee Point representative*
- “I think it should be part of a [funding] proposal that if you’re going to work directly with young people, that you have to speak to the young people ... Part of your funding [should] go towards that” – *Children’s consultation officer*
- “... You can tie it into funding, but ... you [need to] give people the support to make sure it happens properly ... I think you can make connections with funding, but in a way that’s saying ... ‘In funding organisations, we expect organisations to have professional or quality standards in youth work. This includes the following’ ... So it becomes more ... [about] encouraging people than punishing them” – *Representative from the voluntary youth sector*

- “It’s like the EU funding. People weren’t thinking in terms of gender equality until it became a requirement of EU funding that you gave a gender equality focus. And now people do it all the time ... If agencies start to put in a requirement to consult with children, ... it would mean that in ... five, six years time, it would be a normal part of the application process for funding ... It would become an integral part of their work” – *Community and Enterprise Development Officer with a Local Authority*

## 5.4. Implications

Key implications and recommendations arising from the findings presented in this chapter are presented below.

### Finance and funding

- The amounts and conditions of funding made available will play a key role in determining the extent to which inclusive and sustainable opportunities for children and young people to be consulted can be created. Due regard will need to be given to the additional costs that can arise to support the involvement of children and young people experiencing or at risk of social exclusion. The interview findings reveal different views on who has responsibility for funding work in this area. However, there is an expectation that the National Children’s Office and Government Departments will play a role in this regard. Interviewees were also divided on whether funding will lead to the creation of opportunities or whether the creation of opportunities will lead to the availability of funding. Several interviewees suggested that making consultation with children and young people a requirement or condition of funding might act as an incentive to organisations to do it. In light of these findings, the National Children’s Office and others with a responsibility for progressing work in this area, should aim to assess and agree:
  - The nature and amount of resources required, including additional resources required to support the involvement of socially excluded children and young people
  - How these resources might be provided (funding structures)
  - By whom resources might be provided (funding sources)
  - Conditions of funding, including duration of funding
  - If, when and in what ways, a funding requirement or equivalent should be created.
- Future work in this area might also benefit from the creation and dissemination of sufficiently comprehensive information on the cost areas associated with this type of work.
- Some of the additional supports required to facilitate the equitable involvement in consultative processes of children/young people experiencing/most at risk of social exclusion have cost implications. To offset any possibility that these additional costs might curtail an equitable approach to consultation with children and young people, it is suggested that relevant statutory organisations and NGOs:
  - Draw up and disseminate an inclusion policy or equivalent
  - Make inclusion one aspect of future evaluations of their work in this area.
- Given the unpredictable nature of this area of work, it is suggested that funders adopt a flexible approach and that those seeking funding clarify in their applications the nature and degree of the ‘risk factor’ associated with the particular consultative initiative they are seeking funding for.

### Time

- Due consideration needs to be given to the time required to undertake consultative work with children and young people. Awareness also needs to be raised that consulting certain groups of children and young people at risk of or experiencing social exclusion may prove especially time intensive – for example, children/young people with certain physical

disabilities are likely to need additional time to fashion their responses.

- In cases where children/young people are one of several groups to be consulted in relation to a given area of public policy, it is recommended that consultation with them is initiated prior to embarking on consultation with these other groups.

#### **Personnel**

- Relevant organisations need to consider the options available to them with regard to staffing this kind of work: Will it be necessary and possible to appoint an additional member of staff on a full-time, part-time or occasional basis? What is the scope for involving volunteers in one or more ways? To what extent and within what professions is it not only desirable, but feasible for this role to be integrated into the responsibilities of existing staff – for example, teachers and youth workers?

#### **Training**

- Training of individuals to manage, facilitate, supervise or assist with consultation with children and young people is already recognised as a key resource issue. With regard to it, we would suggest that:
  - Training should be made available to professionals who already work with children and young people directly and not only to those who have no previous experience of doing so
  - Varying levels of existing expertise and experience should be reflected in the development of different training programmes
  - It may be desirable in some cases to provide additional training that raises or enhances trainees' understanding of the experiences/abilities of children/young people who are experiencing/most at risk of social exclusion – for example, issues and attitudes around disability, Traveller culture, multiculturalism and youth homelessness.

#### **Supporting Children and Young People**

- It is recognised that children and young people need to be supported to participate in consultative processes. Thought needs to be given to what support is needed and how it might be provided in the short-, medium- and long-term. At a minimum, children and young people should be equipped with:
  - A knowledge of public policies affecting them
  - An understanding of the public policy-making process at national and local level
  - The skills that will enable them to contribute effectively and to the best of their ability.

# Chapter Six: Ethical Issues

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## Introduction

That ethical issues do arise in relation to consultation with children and young people and that it is imperative to adopt an ethical approach to this work was underscored by one interviewee for this study:

*“One of the biggest risks of consultation with children is that it becomes a process of manipulation, annexing kids to an agenda. ... In consulting with children, you’re taking on a strong moral responsibility for what you’re doing.” – Public policy-maker at national level*

The literature reviewed for this study suggests that the following are potentially core ethical issues as regards consulting all children and young people, including those experiencing poverty or other forms of social exclusion:

- Consent
- Confidentiality
- Transparency
- Equality and inclusion
- Respect and integrity.

This chapter addresses these issues with reference to one of more of the four elements of the research – the literature review, the survey of, and interviews with, policy-makers and practitioners as well as the focus groups with children and young people. In conclusion, we present a number of implications and recommendations arising from the findings.

## 6.1. CONSENT

Two aspects of the consent issue are addressed in this section with reference to the literature review, the interviews with policy-makers and practitioners, and the focus groups with children and young people:

- Consent from parents/guardians
- Consent from children and young people.

### 61.1. Consent – What the Literature says

#### Consent from Parents/Guardians

It is standard practice to seek formal consent from their parents/guardians for children’s and young people’s participation in an event or access to an experience that falls outside the typical range of daily activities that a given group of children or young people are exposed to. Schools, youth groups or after school clubs, for example, will often seek consent for the children and young people in their care to go to an event that is taking place outside the premises of the school, youth centre or after school club. Consultation with children and young people is no different. It is typical for formal consent to be requested from parents/guardians for children and young people to become involved in a consultative event or process, in particular where this process/event is taking place in an environment not usually attended by the children and young people in question and/or at a time when the children and young people in question might normally be otherwise engaged and/or where this process or event relates to an external decision-making process. For example, formal consent was sought from parents/guardians for children and young people to attend the first session of Dáil na nÓg held at Mansion House in September 2001 and the local Comhairle na

nÓg organised by the ISPC, the National Children's Office and Dún Laoghaire Rathdown Development Board and held in Dún Laoghaire town hall in February 2002.

However, a striking finding of the literature review is that although gaining formal consent from parents/guardians is common practice and the need to do so considered part-and-parcel of good practice, the question of what consent should be sought for is not discussed. It is only possible to speculate whether this may be symptomatic of an unreflective approach to the activity of seeking and gaining consent and whether such an approach may be a side-effect of this activity having become routine. We would suggest that consideration be given to what parents/guardians should be required to give their formal consent to prior to a child or young person becoming involved in a consultation relating to public policy development. Should consent be required, for example, for a child/young person to be in a particular place and/or at a particular time and/or to be consulted and/or to be consulted in relation to a particular issue? Careful reflection is needed on this matter and, furthermore, on whether it will be appropriate to adopt a 'one size fits all' approach in responding to it:

- Will it be more appropriate to tailor the request for consent to take account of the age or capacities of a given child or young person?
- Are there specific areas of public policy where it will be appropriate to seek consent to discuss these with children and young people and others where it might not be necessary?
- Is it appropriate to seek consent for a child or young person to be consulted in light of the fact that being afforded opportunities to have a say and to contribute to decision-making processes affecting them is a *right* of children and young people? In what instances and on what grounds might this right legitimately be overridden by a parent's or guardian's entitlement to exercise their duty of care to their child?

A final key question relating to consent from parents/guardians that ought to be addressed, agreed and clarified is: From whom should consent be sought when the parents/guardians of a given child or young person are unavailable or unable for one or more reasons to provide it? A version of this question also requiring of clarification arises in relation to particular groups of children and young people experiencing or at risk of poverty and/or other forms of social exclusion: From whom should consent be sought in the case of children and young people who are in residential care or who are out of home on their own? Is it sufficient and appropriate to seek consent from the professionals who care for and/or work with these children and young people? And, in the case of children out of home on their own, who is the appropriate professional to seek consent from?

### **Consent from Children and Young People**

Another important matter that arises in relation to the issue of consent is whether it is necessary to obtain formal consent from the children and young people one is seeking to consult with. The literature on previous and existing opportunities reviewed for this study was not particularly forthcoming on this issue either. That children's and young people's involvement in consultative processes/events should be voluntary surfaces in the literature as something of a given of good practice. Reports of consultative processes or events can include passing references to children and young people having been 'invited' to participate, but tend not to provide detailed information on the nature of these invitations.

Moreover, it is not uncommon to find that, in inviting and encouraging children and young people to have their say, the organisers of a consultative process omit to impress upon prospective participating children and young people that their involvement is intended to be and should be voluntary. This would appear to be more typically the case in relation to large scale consultation processes regarding public policy development. The public advertisements that sought submissions from children and young people in relation to the *National Children's Strategy* and the materials developed by the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission to support children and young people in making submissions on the *Bill of Rights* invited and



encouraged their involvement, but said nothing to children and young people about doing so on a voluntary basis.

It might be argued that doing so is unnecessary: children and young people are, after all, unlikely to respond to such invitations unless they wish to. However, we would suggest that, at a time when implementation of Goal One is in its infancy and there is increasing discussion around whether and how to structurally embed children's and young people's voices in decision-making processes relating to relevant areas of public policy, it will be in the interests of future good practice to use every available opportunity to raise children's and young people's awareness of the principle of voluntarism. Furthermore, it is open to question whether it ought to be assumed that children and young people will only respond if *they* wish to. Believing that this would be a good experience for the children/young people, parents, guardians, teachers, youth workers and other relevant professionals might encourage, cajole or indirectly insist that children/young people respond positively to such invitations. While a child or young person may refuse to comply, it cannot be assumed that this will be the case: children and young people can also comply out of a desire to please or as a favour to the adult making the request or because it does not occur to them that they might have the option to refuse. Since such actions run contrary to the principle of voluntarism and preclude children and young people from making a choice about whether they wish to be heard (an important dimension of active citizenship), we would suggest that efforts should also be made to impress upon relevant adults the importance of enabling children and young people to exercise choice with regard to having their say on a particular issue.

While the researchers did not engage with it in any depth, one area that may provide food for reflection on this aspect of the consent issue is the area of research with children and young people. Both the questions being posed within the research community in relation to this issue as well as the approaches that have been taken by researchers in response to it are likely to be applicable and/or adaptable to the context of consulting children and young people in relation to public policy development. Alderson and Hill,<sup>115</sup> for example, both suggest that it is now generally accepted that ethical research with children and young people will entail seeking and gaining their informed consent prior to involving them in a research project. Both also acknowledge that there are and should be a variety of approaches taken to securing consent from children. In so doing, both establish competency as a key issue for consideration in this regard: When is a child sufficiently competent to be involved in a decision around their involvement in a piece of research? And how can researchers "truly" judge when a child is competent to do so given that "how we judge that is often from an adult perspective"?<sup>116</sup>

In addition to the research community, the NGO sector is likely to be a source of useful information on approaches to gaining children's and young people's consent to be consulted. The ISPCC, for example, currently sends out an information form about a given consultation to parents/guardians and children/young people and provides space for both parties to sign their names. Once the signed form has been returned, further information about the consultation is sent out to the child/young person. This information, however, was disclosed in conversation with one of the researchers. Judging from the literature review, it is less likely that NGO approaches will have been documented in a published format. As such, accessing this information would constitute a piece of research in itself. However, given the significance of the issue and the role that NGOs will be called upon to play in creating/developing opportunities for children and young people to be consulted in relation to public policy development, the researchers would suggest that it is a piece of work worth undertaking.

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<sup>115</sup> Alderson, P., *Listening to Children: Children, Ethics and Social Research* (Barkingside: Barnardos, 1995) and Hill, M., 'Ethical Issues in Qualitative Methodology with Children', in Hogan, D. and Gilligan, R. (eds.), *Researching Children's Experiences: Qualitative Approaches* (Dublin: Children's Research Centre TCD, 1998), pp. 11-22. See also Beresford, B., *Personal Accounts: Involving Disabled Children in Research* (London: The Stationery Office, 1997).

<sup>116</sup> Hill (1998), p. 15.

If, as is being recommended, research is undertaken on this theme, this research could also look at ways of determining children's and young people's willingness to remain involved in a consultation process following their initial consent to become involved. Again, the research community has stressed both the importance of doing this and ways in which it might be done. Marchant, for example, has suggested that children should be afforded opportunities to initiate breaks, to ask for explanations in relation to a given question and to refuse to answer questions.<sup>117</sup> Taking a broader view, there are different stages of a consultation process (other than the planning stage) when the principle of voluntarism might be communicated to participating children and young people:

- At the beginning of the consultation itself, children and young people can be reminded that they do not have to participate or respond to a particular question
- During the consultation, children and young people can be asked whether they wish to continue or to respond to a particular question
- At the end of the consultation, children and young people can be asked whether they still wish their observations, views and ideas to be taken into account
- Children and young people can be involved in the editing of any materials that will document their views and/or can be asked prior to publication of such materials whether they still wish for their contributions to be included.

Provision will need to be made at the planning stage for the eventuality of a child/young person indicating that they do not wish to continue being involved in a consultation. If it is not possible for the child/young person to leave the consultation setting, then there will need to be adequate levels of supervision to ensure that the child/young person can be looked after. In addition, it will be desirable to provide the child/young person with alternative activities until the session is concluded. The ISPCC, for example, provides children/young people attending its fora with activity sheets (word puzzles, word games, and so on) to cover this and other possible eventualities such as unforeseen delays in proceedings.

### 6.1.2. Consent – Interview findings

Three of the ten interviewees spoke briefly about the issue of consent. Two interviewees spoke about consent from parents/guardians and in so doing stressed its importance. The first interviewee cited below made reference to the consent issue in the context of speaking about legal and insurance issues relating to consultation with children and young people. The second interviewee cited below also spoke about consent in this way, but suggested that seeking and gaining consent was something that should be done out of respect for and in order to inform parents/guardians.

*“Consent is a huge issue ... Getting actual consent forms signed by parents” – Public policy-maker at national level*

*“[P]arental permission is crucial ... [G]iving us their permission to speak directly to their children ... is a way ... of [us] ensuring ... that we are covered ... When you're ... focusing in on an area, I think parents need to know what that area is ... I think it's out of respect ... for the parent and giving them the option whether or not they want their child to attend” – Children's consultation officer*

A third interviewee focused her remarks on the issue of seeking consent from children and young people. In so doing, she alluded to an issue discussed in section 6.1.1 above, namely the possibility of adults pressurising children and young people to become involved in a consultative process:

*“There should also be an element of choice as to whether they would wish to be involved ... Different pressures come from groups ... They [could] feel that it's ... something that they have to do. Parents ... saying: ‘You've got to do it’ ... Those*

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<sup>117</sup> See Ward (1997), p. 22. This text includes a useful ‘checklist for action’, including the issue of children's and young people's consent (p.38).

things have to be looked at in relation to consultation with children.” – *Practitioner working with children and young people with physical disabilities*

### 6.1.3. Consent – What Children and Young People say

Participants in the focus groups were asked the following questions relating to consent:

- Is it important to you to have the choice of participating in something like this (i.e. a consultation)?
- Do you think it’s important to get permission from the parents/guardians of children and young people?
- Does it make a difference to you to know that your parents/guardians have said it’s ok for you to be here today?

#### Consent from Children and Young People

A resounding majority of participants (56 out of 62) said that it was important to be afforded the choice of participating in a consultation. One participant said that it was not important, arguing that the choice and thus the decision regarding his participation should rest with his parents, not with him. One participant made no comment. An additional four participants said that ‘it depends’.

For those who affirmed that children and young people should have the choice, the same reason was given as to why and, what is more, presented in most cases as entirely obvious and straightforward: children and young people should not and cannot be made to participate if they do not wish to.

- “They can’t make us do it ... It’s better if you ask us”
- “We should have the right not to participate if we don’t want to”
- “I think they [adults] should ask children”
- “If you didn’t want to do it, it’s up to you. Like, nobody can put you to do it”
- “We should have the decision”

In asserting that they should be able to choose, several children and young people also commented critically that adults do not always or often enough afford children and young people the opportunity to make choices:

- “Most people just force children to do stuff”
- “Children are really meant to have a choice ... They do have a choice, but most children don’t have a choice”

Moreover, one child suggested that, while consent should be sought from children/young people, doing so can be tokenistic since it is unlikely that children/young people will be able to participate if their parents/guardians withhold consent: “Yeah, but if we wanted to do it and Mum and Dad didn’t want us to do it, we wouldn’t do it ... So we still have no choice.” This scenario is a very real one. It casts a challenging shadow over the scope for seeking consent from children and young people in a meaningful way and raises the following questions:

- Are there instances when it might be feasible and appropriate to attempt to negotiate an alternative outcome with a parent/guardian who has withheld consent, but whose child wishes to participate?
- Are there instances where this scenario might arise when it might be appropriate to override the wishes of the parent/guardian in favour of the child’s/young person’s wishes?

One focus group, comprising four young people aged 16 and 17 years, relativised the issue of seeking consent from children/young people on three grounds:

- Age
  - "You can't give a ten or twelve year old a consent form saying 'Do you want to go to this?' because they won't have a clue"
  - "If you're fifteen you think you know, but you don't"
- The theme of the consultation
- The possibility that seeking consent from children/young people might prompt an unnecessary conflict between children/young people and their parents/guardians in the event that there are differences of view between both parties regarding a child's/young person's involvement.

### **Consent from Parents/Guardians**

In response to the question of whether it is important to seek consent from parents/guardians for children/young people to be involved in a consultation:

- 47 participants said 'yes'
- 5 participants said 'yes', but added relativising comments
- 1 participant said 'no'
- 12 participants said that 'it depends'
- 2 participants made no comment.

Again, a significant majority of participants asserted the importance of seeking and gaining consent from parents/guardians. They did so on a variety of grounds:

- Safety of children and young people
- Peace of mind for parents/guardians
- Parents/guardians are entitled to be asked for their consent
- Parents/guardians are entitled to be informed
- Parents/guardians are those invested with responsibility for children/young people
- Parents/guardians have authority
- Children/young people might get into trouble if consent is not sought from parents/guardians.

Of these reasons, the safety of children and young people was the most frequent reason given.

- "You have to get permission ... It's just right"
- "That's the whole thing about being a parent or guardian. You have to ... know where, like, your youth or your children's going"
- "They are in charge"
- "Because they are responsible for you"
- "Because ... if they didn't know we were going to that place, they'd be worrying and the police an' all could be involved"
- "In case I go missing"
- "So they know where you are"
- "So they know who you are with and know what you are doing"
- "for security reasons"
- "Even if you're, like, seventeen ... you can't just disappear and then come back later and your Ma's, like, 'Where were you all day?' And it's, like, 'Oh ... I was at this meeting thing'"
- "Because if I went home then and me ma didn't know where I was I'd get grounded for a month"

The seventeen participants who relativised the issue of parental consent were all young people, aged between 13 and 17 years. Accordingly, age was the principal ground on which they relativised the need for gaining consent from parents/guardians:

- “I’m nearly 15 and I still have to get my Ma to say it in writing. I don’t like that”
- “I hate asking my Ma for permission”
- “From the parents’ point of view, it would be yeah, they should get it [a consent form] ... but from our point of view, we think we’re old enough [to decide for ourselves]”

A small number of participants said that consent should not be sought for young people (second level students) to become involved in a consultation unless doing so is a legal requirement. In addition, participants in one focus group stressed the importance of reflecting on what consent is being sought for from parents/guardians. In doing so, they argued that consent should not be sought for children/young people to be consulted since children/young people have a right to express their views and to be heard. The participant who said ‘no’ in response to the question gave an additional reason when he suggested that it should not be necessary “unless it’s something to do with insurance”.

When asked whether it made a difference to them to know that their parents/guardians had consented to their involvement:

- 35 participants said ‘yes’
- 16 said ‘no’
- 5 said ‘it depends’
- 6 gave no comment.

As with the previous question, the principal reason given by those who said that it did make a difference was bound up with the issue of safety/protection, whereby many participants said that they felt more at ease knowing that their parents/guardians had consented to their involvement. Several participants recognised receiving consent from their parents/guardians as an indication of their parents’/guardians’ interest in and/or support for their involvement in a process that afforded them an opportunity to have a say.

- “They know where you are”
- “It feels more safe because your parents know”
- “Yeah. Because we can be relaxed”
- “Yeah, because, like, then they know you’re there and they’re letting you go”
- “They are interested in what we are doing”
- “It’s good to know they’re interested in your voice and your opinions”
- “Because they know you’re getting involved in ... the local community ... That you’re not, like, on the streets ... taking drugs ... drinking alcohol. They actually know where you are and you’re doing something that will help”

The sixteen participants who said it did not matter did not elaborate on this. The five participants who equivocated said that it would only matter in the sense of being a source of reassurance for them to know that their parents/guardians had consented. That it could serve this purpose would depend on what they were being consulted on and where the consultation was taking place.

## 6.2. CONFIDENTIALITY

### 6.2.1. Confidentiality – What the Literature says

As it pertains to consultation processes aimed at enabling children and young people to contribute to relevant areas of public policy development, the evidence would suggest that confidentiality is taken to mean anonymity or quasi-anonymity, what Hill terms “public confidentiality”.<sup>118</sup> Confidentiality in these senses is certainly common practice as regards consultation processes with children/young people relating to public policy development. Documentation on the findings of such consultation processes, for example, may cite children and young people directly, but their full names will not appear alongside these citations or at any other point in the document. Instead, citations will be:

- **Unattributed** – This would appear to be standard practice for Save the Children, for example, whose reports on consultations with children/young people on issues relating to public policy, among others, do not attribute quotations from children and young people in any way.
- **Attributed in a way that makes it impossible for an outsider to identify the child or young person in question** – An example of this practice is the report on the public consultation for the *National Children’s Strategy*. In most cases in this report, the first name and the age of the child/young person are placed alongside his or her comment.

However, it is not clear what the rationale for these approaches is. While it is likely to be the case, it cannot be assumed that these approaches are intended to be a function of child protection. Nor is it clear whether, if this is the case, this rationale has been developed with specific regard to children’s and young people’s involvement in consultation processes relating to matters of public policy or whether it is an offshoot of the fact that confidentiality is practiced in other contexts where children’s voices are heard – for example, in the area of research with children/young people or in the context of services where children/young people may be speaking about very personal matters. Nor is it clear whether the manner in which their comments are presented in such reports will have been clarified with children/young people from the outset or negotiated with them. Nor is it clear from the literature whether one should assume that these approaches, by virtue of being common practice, constitute good practice. Furthermore, the issue of anonymity would not appear to arise in relation to other mechanisms that have been created to facilitate consultation with children and young people in relation to public policy development. For example, their involvement in national or local fora that have been established for the purposes of enabling them to be heard can render children and young people more visible than they might ever have had previous occasion to be. Again, it is not clear whether the issue of anonymity has been addressed in relation to such contexts and/or with the participating children and young people themselves. Nor is it clear whether, if it has been addressed, anonymity has been waived, for example, because the children/young people in question are speaking in a representative capacity and/or because they have decided to waive anonymity and/or because it is anticipated that they will be seen and/or heard, but not seen and heard *simultaneously*.

Given this lack of clarity, we would suggest that the development of good practice will benefit from macro level engagement with and agreement on how to respond to the following questions:

- Should confidentiality, anonymity or quasi-anonymity be regarded as an ethical touchstone of good practice for consulting children and young people on relevant areas of public policy? If so, why?

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<sup>118</sup> Hill (1998), p. 19.

- Are there public policy areas/themes where this might not arise as an ethical and/or a protection issue? In the case of those areas where it is seen to arise, will it be more appropriate to ensure confidentiality, anonymity or quasi-anonymity?
- In the case of those areas where it is seen to arise, what are the mechanisms and settings through and within which children and young people can speak such that confidentiality, anonymity or quasi-anonymity are safeguarded?
- In those cases where confidentiality, anonymity or quasi-anonymity are being guaranteed, who should and who should not have direct or indirect access to the identity of participants and/or to information that enables them to be linked to their contributions?
- Should children and young people capable of doing so be afforded an opportunity to choose whether or not their contributions are confidential, anonymous, quasi-anonymous or attributed to them? If so, and if a child/young person wishes their comments to be attributed in quasi-anonymous terms, should they be able to choose what these terms are?
- If children and young people capable of so doing are to be afforded an opportunity to choose, should consent be sought from their parents/guardians prior to implementing the wishes of the child/young person?

Furthermore, once taken, a decision on confidentiality will need to be communicated to participating children and young people in those cases where children and young people are being consulted in a group context. This is to ensure that members of the group understand what they can and cannot say about other participants' contributions. Recognising that it can be difficult for anyone, including children and young people, to remain completely silent in response to subsequent curiosity and inquiry from, for example, a relative or friend, Hill recommends that one might suggest to participants that "it is all right to say something very general about the topics discussed but not to give details and not to identify what any individual said." A further issue on confidentiality that warrants consideration in relation to consulting children and young people in a public policy context is what Hill terms "network confidentiality": keeping the information provided by a child or young person "secret" from relatives, friends and other people they know who may express an interest in knowing what the child or young person said during a consultation. We would suggest that there is no reason why Hill's corresponding recommendation – adhere to whatever has been agreed from the outset – should not apply in a public policy development context.<sup>119</sup>

A final issue relating to confidentiality that arises in the Irish context in light of *Children First*<sup>120</sup> and *Our Duty to Care* is mandatory reporting. It will be *essential* for consensus to be reached on whether mandatory reporting should be operational in the context of consultative processes with children and young people relating to public policy development. The decision taken will need to be widely disseminated so as to ensure that there is clarity on how to proceed in the event of a) it appearing that a child/young person may be making or about to make a disclosure and b) a child/young person making a disclosure. Furthermore, if it is decided to operate mandatory reporting in this context, it will be necessary to decide on when and in what formats this information should be communicated to children and young people as well as their parents/guardians.

### 6.2.2. Confidentiality – Interview findings

While interviewees were not asked a question relating specifically to ethical issues, it was interesting to find upon analysis of the findings that none of the interviewees made any comments relating to confidentiality. While it is likely that interviewees would have had things to say about this issue had they been asked to speak to it, the fact that they did not

<sup>119</sup> Hill (1998), p. 19.

<sup>120</sup> Department of Health and Children, *Children First: National Guidelines for the Protection and Welfare of Children* (Dublin: Stationery Office, 1999) and *Our Duty to Care: Principles of Good Practice for the Protection of Children & Young People* (Dublin: DHC, 2002).

address it themselves does raise the question of whether there might be a need to raise awareness of the issue of confidentiality among policy-makers and practitioners alike in the interests of promoting an ethical approach to consultation with children and young people.

### 6.2.3. Confidentiality – What Children and Young People say

Participants in the focus groups were asked two questions relating to “public confidentiality”, the meaning of which was explained to them prior to being asked these questions:

- Do you think that information provided by children and young people should be treated in confidence?
- Do you mind that your individual names won’t be included in anything that we publish in relation to this project?

In response to the first of these questions:

- 30 participants said ‘yes’
- 4 participants said ‘yes’, but added relativising comments
- 4 participants said ‘no’
- 22 participants said that ‘it depends’
- 2 participants made no comment.

The thirty children and young people who confirmed that they would wish information provided by them to be treated in confidence did so on the following grounds:

- Safety
- Protection from the possibility of being derided for their involvement and/or for what they say
- Embarrassment
- Personal/private information.

A number of participants simply asserted that their privacy should be upheld.

- “It should be treated as private ... No names used. Just the ideas”
- “I don’t think, like, you should write names beside them [opinions/ideas]”
- “I don’t want people knowing what I think”
- “No one’s business. Could be private stuff”
- “People could use it against you to hurt your feelings”
- “Because of kid robbers”
- “... because if someone calls you a bad name”
- “It’s safer if they don’t know”
- “Because of rumours ... In [name of town], they’re nosy as can be ... Everyone knows your business”
- “... when you don’t want your name in it, you’d be embarrassed [if it was used]”
- “We might be laughed at”

Twenty-six participants relativised the need for confidentiality. Many of them did so by asserting that children and young people should be afforded the choice of whether “public confidentiality” should be upheld. Other reasons given were:

- It would depend on whether or not the people reading any material containing their comments would know them. If they did not know them, public confidentiality would not be important
- In the case of group consultations, the group could be named in identifiable terms, but not the individual members of the group
- Information of a personal or private nature should be kept confidential
- It would depend on the theme of the consultation and the information participants are being invited to divulge. If the issue in question is particularly sensitive, then an individual may not even want their comments cited, let alone attributed.



- “There should be a choice”
- “It would depend on what situation it is”
- “It doesn’t matter. As long as the person knows, like. If somebody did it behind your back, then you wouldn’t like it”
- “If you ... want it open, you just turn around and say ‘I want it to be open’ and that’d be grand”
- “If somebody wants their name beside it ... that’s their choice”
- “Individual opinion must be confidential, but the general voice should out, so people know”
- Your name should be used, if you so wish, “if it’s something you’re proud of”

The four participants who did not feel that their views should be subject to “public confidentiality” were quite assertive in this regard:

- “Why should our ideas be treated privately?”
- “I’d like my name. I want my name put down ... What I said, I want my name put down beside it ... If you’re putting down something belonging to me in the book, I would want my name put down beside it”
- “I wouldn’t mind if she [researcher] put me name on it ... because I’d like to be heard ... I would prefer [my name to be used]”

The response of a fourth participant underscores the importance of clarifying with children and young people the implications of their involvement in a given consultative process or event: attributing an experience/opinion/idea to an individual child/young person is a good idea because it would enable the people reading the document to help that child/young person.

In response to the question of whether they minded that their names would not be included in any documentation arising from this research project:

- 13 participants said ‘yes’
- 37 participants said ‘no’
- 5 participants equivocated
- 7 participants made no comment.

This question was purposefully similar to the previous question regarding “public confidentiality” and was asked in order to ensure that participants had understood this concept and to see whether phrasing the theme in another way might prompt a different response. As can be seen from the figures, the principal shift entailed a much smaller number of participants relativising their response and a significantly larger number of participants responding to the question in the negative. As can be seen some of the comments presented below, the reasons participants gave entailed a reiteration of some of the reasons given in relation to the previous question. Many participants who said ‘no’ simply stated that they did not mind. A small number of participants who did want their comments attributed to them began to specify the terms of that attribution.

#### Yes

- “Like this is important ... [I]t means that ... people are going to respect you”
- “I would like my name to be published”
- “I’d like my name to be used”
- “I’d like to put down the first name, but I wouldn’t like my second name in it”
- “I would like my name to be on it”
- “I’d like my full name”

- 5 young Travellers said that they would like to have their status as such recognised. However, their explanation was sobering: “Because at the end of the day, you are a Traveller. There’s nothing you can do about it.”
- “And why would that [public confidentiality] protect us? Life’s going to go on now”
- “I want me name put down”
- “Why should they [our names] be treated privately? Why? Why? Like if we’re coming here to talk to you, why should they be treated privately?”

#### No

- “I don’t my name not to be used”
- “I don’t mind ... I don’t care”
- “No, I don’t want my name to be included”
- “No, because then everyone would know who it is”
- No, but “we wouldn’t be saying it if we didn’t want to be heard”
- “As long as my ideas are in, I don’t [mind]”

#### It depends

- Would like names used “so long as you’re [we are] not going to be mocked, ... you’re [we are] going to be respected”

## 6.3. TRANSPARENCY

### 6.3.1. Transparency – What the Literature says

Enabling children to make an informed decision about their involvement in a consultation is widely recognised as a given of ethical practice. Clear, concise yet sufficiently comprehensive information in formats appropriate to the children’s and young people’s ages and capacities should be provided in relation to the following issues:

- The theme(s) of the consultation, including an indication of the questions to be asked
- The aim(s) of the consultation
- The implication(s) of involvement, i.e. what expectations participants can and cannot have of their involvement in a consultative process
- Approaches being taken to other ethical issues, such as consent (voluntary involvement) and confidentiality
- Who else will be present or involved in the consultation
- Methodologies
- The venue for the consultation, its duration, a schedule for its constituent parts as well as other practical details concerning, for example, transport arrangements and refreshments
- A contact person with whom to follow-up any additional queries.

It will also be important to provide this information to the parents/guardians/carers from whom consent is being sought as well as to allow time at the beginning of the consultation to reiterate this information to participants and provide them with an opportunity to ask questions or seek reassurances on one or more aspects of the consultation.

In addition, information ought to be provided in advance of and/or during the consultation on:

- What other stakeholders are being consulted
- How long this broader consultation process will take and when participants can expect to receive feedback
- How long it is likely to take until the proposed outcomes of the process (e.g. a set of recommendations, proposals, the provision of a particular service) are available – children and young people need to be made aware that the speed of public policy development / democratic

decision-making can be glacial, not least because this is contrary to what White characterises as “the immediacy and urgency of young people’s view of the need for action”<sup>121</sup>

- Whether it is proposed to seek the involvement of participants in subsequent stages of the process and, if so, what these stages are – for example, will participants be invited to comment on the findings?

In light of this final point, it will be desirable, where possible, to ensure that participating children and young people have a contact person with whom they or someone acting on their behalf can follow-up with queries, both in the immediate aftermath of the consultation and for the duration of the policy development process in relation to which they have been consulted.

### 6.3.2. Transparency – Interview Findings

Seven interviewees raised the issue of transparency. They stressed the importance of providing children and young people with adequate information to enable them to make an informed decision regarding their participation in a consultation and a meaningful contribution to it. Most interviewees also identified particular pieces of information which they felt children and young people should receive, namely:

- In cases where other stakeholders are also being consulted, how the consultation with children and young people fits into this broader consultative process
- The purpose of the consultation with children and young people
- The aim of the consultative process as a whole and its possible impacts
- What consultation means and what expectations they should have about their involvement in a consultation
- The theme(s) of the consultation and what they will be asked
- How information they provide will be used/treated.

In addition, one interviewee spoke about the need to ensure that children and young people receive such information in accessible language and formats.

### Providing Children and Young People with Information

- “They need to know exactly where it’s [the consultation with them] fitting in, what their role is in it, where it’s going, possible impacts, ... what they can expect” – *Health Board practitioner*
- “That’s one of my fears around ... doing consultation: how clear they are [about] where something like that is going or what you’re asking them about ... Another thing is how informed they are around the subject ... Young people ... need to have a clear understanding ... about the subject matter being discussed” – *Pavee Point representative*
- “When you’re starting off with something new like this ... with children, ... one has to assume that they don’t necessarily understand where you’re coming from. ... They need to understand why they’re doing it” – *Public policy-maker at national level*
- “Consultation itself has to be explained to the child ... Informing the young people ... of what your expectations [are], allowing them to say what their expectations are” – *Children’s consultation officer*
- “... what you’re going to do with the information when you consult them, where it’s going, how it’s going to be used” – *Representative from the voluntary youth sector*
- “There’s a big onus on the person going to consult to be clear what they’re consulting about” – *Public policy-maker at national level*

<sup>121</sup> White (2000/2001), p. 35

- "... agencies are going to have to get their head round how information is going to be disseminated because obviously it needs to be ... articulated in a very clear, meaningful way for children so that they can digest it" – *Community and Enterprise Development Officer with a Local Authority*

### 6.3.3. Transparency – What Children and Young People say

Participants were asked one question relating to the importance or otherwise of children and young people receiving information about a consultation they are being invited to participate in: Is it important that you are given information about the event or project you are being asked to participate in?

A resounding majority of participants (60 out of 62) asserted the importance of receiving information. Most participants asserted the importance of knowing what they are being asked to become involved in so that they can make an informed decision regarding their involvement. Several participants suggested that receiving information in advance of a consultation would curtail their need to interrupt the consultation itself to seek clarification. Two participants suggested that their capacity to participate would be dependent on or influenced by their having received information about the consultation in advance of it. A number of participants argued that children/young people would be encouraged to attend or would only attend a consultation on foot of having received information about it. Four participants in one focus group suggested that, while information was needed, it should be as concise as possible ("... a brief outline about it"). Five participants in one focus group articulated their appreciation for having received information in advance of their participation in Dáil na nÓg.

#### Receiving Information about a Consultation

- "So you know whether it's good or bad ... if it's interesting or boring"
- "They told us everything that was going to happen" (re: Dáil na nÓg)
- "So you know whether you'd like it or not"
- "I wouldn't know what you were doing [otherwise]"
- "I'd say ... what is it about first, ask a few questions, am I invited, what will be accomplished out of it, what is the topics that's going to be discussed ... You have to know the information before you go to it ... If you give them [children/young people] information about it, it will encourage them to go"
- "Very important ... You can't just, like, turn up without the information"
- "So you know if it's appropriate for young people"
- "Because you would not know anything about it"
- "You'd be going round in circles [otherwise]"
- "You do need the information because you wouldn't just turn up"
- "It's just because you could go and you wouldn't know, like ... what it would be about"
- Otherwise "... you'd be interrupting all the time, like, 'What's going on? ... What's going on?' and people asking these questions"
- "You should know what you are going to before you decide to do it or not"
- "So you know what you're talking about"
- "So you can participate"

## 6.4. EQUALITY and INCLUSION

### 6.4.1. Equality and Inclusion – What the Literature says

One of the stated objectives of Goal One of the *National Children's Strategy* is to ensure that an equitable approach is taken to involving children and young people in relevant decision-making processes by providing "additional resources and supports to enable marginalised children to participate equally".<sup>122</sup> As was underscored in Chapter One, evidence has been gathered and documented which suggests that, in addition to young children, children and young people experiencing or most at risk of social exclusion are less likely to be involved in consultative processes involving children and young people in the round. The language of Goal One suggests a commitment to redressing this reality from the outset by ensuring that children and young people not only have equal access to consultative processes, but that efforts will be made to provide for their equitable involvement in these processes. Accordingly, this section briefly discusses equality/inclusion under the headings of 'access' and 'involvement'. Returning to a theme discussed in Chapter Three (section 3.2.), this section also briefly addresses equality/inclusion at the level of outcome and in relation to the treatment of children's and young people's views.

#### Access

In implementing the commitment to provide for equal access to consultation in the context of public policy development, the key question that needs to be addressed is: How can existing approaches to inclusion be rendered equitable? The consultation process with children and young people in relation to the *National Children's Strategy* provides examples of two different approaches to inclusion. Mary Hanafin's visit to ten schools selected by the Department of Education and Science as representing a cross-section of the different styles of schools in Ireland constitutes a targeted and pragmatic approach to inclusion. While it is to be assumed that these schools were selected on the basis that their diversity would reflect and hence give access to a diversity of students, the point with regard to this approach to inclusion is that it is anchored in the idea of type: a type of person representing a type of experience and speaking in a type of way about that experience. Although it may not have been intended to hear the voice/views of a given child/young person as representative of a particular group of children/young people and while the voice/views of the child/young person may not have been heard in that way, this approach necessarily carries within it an aspiration that that voice and those views will be representative in some way

This approach to inclusion is commonplace. Moreover, it is set to become a principal approach towards enabling children and young people to contribute to public policy development at both national and local level in Ireland. This was the approach taken, for example, in relation to the first session of Dáil na nÓg and it is to be expected that it will continue in relation to future sessions of this national forum and adopted in relation to the Comhairle na nÓg that are being established at local level. Ensuring that the application of this approach to inclusion is ethical at the level of access will require those involved in the creation and development of such fora to:

- Enable children and young people to elect representatives to these fora<sup>123</sup>
- Equip children and young people with the ability to elect individuals from among their peer group
- Clarify with those elected that they are being expected to speak in a representative capacity, who they are being expected to represent and that they are willing to speak and be heard in this way. If, for example, a young person out of home is to speak and be heard as a representative of young people out of home, then this needs to be clarified and agreed with him/her
- Prepare those elected to speak in a representative capacity.

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<sup>122</sup> Government of Ireland (2000), p. 32.

<sup>123</sup> It is proposed that delegates to the Comhairle na nÓg will elect delegates to the next session of Dáil na nÓg.

A second approach to inclusion at the level of access is represented by the call for submissions from children and young people issued by Mary Hanafin through national newspapers, magazines, relevant journals, libraries, Scoilnet and the Department of Health and Children website. In theory this amounted to an invitation to *every* child and young person in Ireland to submit their *individual* observations, views and ideas, whereby it can be assumed if not presumed that the submissions received were treated as those of *individual* children and young people. It is possible that this approach to inclusion will also be a feature of future consultation with children and young people in relation to public policy development. Ensuring that its application is ethical at the level of access will require above all that efforts are made to raise awareness of a given consultation process of this kind among as many children and young people as possible and that they receive sufficient information in language and formats appropriate to their ages and capacities. As regards language and formats, it will be important to avoid the kind of unnecessary tokenism that informed, for example, the online materials created by the Northern Ireland Office of Law Reform for its public consultation with children and young people on physical punishment in the home: there is nothing to be gained from presenting materials as being for children aged “0-11 years” when the materials in question are completely inaccessible to an infant, toddler or young child and are likely to be inaccessible to many children up to 11 years whose literacy skills are not at a high level.<sup>124</sup>

### **Involvement**

In implementing the commitment to provide for the equal involvement in a consultation process relating to public policy development, those involved in the development and implementation of the representative approach will help to ensure that it is ethical by:

- Assessing whether representatives from diverse groups are indeed capable of and comfortable with making contributions in an integrated group setting
- Equipping representatives with the supports they need to contribute to the best of their ability in this setting
- Providing alternatives or modifications to the integrated group setting in the short-, medium- or long-term in the event that members of a particular group of children/young people are not or cannot be supported to be comfortable in such a setting to the extent that they can contribute on an equal footing.

Similarly, those involved in the development and implementation of public consultations that invite individual children and young people to make submissions on that basis will help to ensure that this approach is ethical by:

- Enabling children and young people to respond in formats that allow them to contribute to the best of their ability
- Providing children and young people with sufficient time to respond
- Equipping those who might be able and willing to facilitate children and young people in making their contributions (the facilitator guides prepared by the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission to enable teachers and youth workers to assist children and young people in preparing their contributions to the Bill of Rights are a good example in this regard<sup>125</sup>).

### **Outcome: Treatment of Views**

An additional aspect to the equality issue pertains to the manner in which children’s and young people’s voices are heard and their views treated. Questions arising in relation to this matter have already been discussed in Chapter Three in terms of what a commitment to ‘taking on board’ children’s and young people’s views might or ought to mean (see Chapter Three, section 3.2.). It is widely recognised that good and ethical practice in relation to consulting children and young people entails a commitment to take their views seriously. Both Article 12 of the CRC and Goal One of the Strategy acknowledge and promote this

<sup>124</sup> See [www.olrni.gov.uk/youngpeople/a/activity1.htm](http://www.olrni.gov.uk/youngpeople/a/activity1.htm).

<sup>125</sup> See Chapter One (section 1.4.).

approach when they speak of “due weight” being afforded to the child’s/young person’s views in accordance with his/her age and maturity. As was highlighted by our discussion in Chapter Three, such provisions will need to be teased out in light of their implications. They also need to be afforded consideration given that they raise more questions than answers at the present time:

- What is “due” weight?
- How are age and maturity to be assessed and applied, and by whom?
- Ought views to be treated equally or equally relative to the age and maturity of the contributors?
- If views are to be treated equally relative to the age and maturity of the contributors, does this mean that the views of older children will automatically be afforded more weight than those of younger children or that the views of children and young people will be automatically afforded less weight than those of adults?
- If views are to be treated equally relative to the age and maturity of the contributors, does this not run contrary to one of the most common arguments for consulting children/young people in the first place, namely that their contributions will be qualitatively different rather than better or worse than those of adults?
- If children’s and young people’s views are to be treated as those of ‘experts’ or ‘precocious experts’, what impact will this have in the event that their views come into conflict with those of adult professionals and experts whose knowledge/experience and hence views we are accustomed to placing a high value on?

It is questionable whether measures and criteria that address these questions can be meaningfully prescribed in advance of and in isolation from a specific consultation. However, there is also a risk entailed in leaving the assessment of the weight to be afforded to a child’s or young person’s views until after s/he has spoken. There is a danger that where the views of a child/young person digress from the views of adult ‘experts’ participating in the same consultation and/or from the expectations of those responsible for assessing all responses that the views of that child/young person will be given less, little or no consideration. In other words, there is a risk that a dissenting view or a young voice may be heard as an incompetent view or incapable voice and that only those views and voices that conform to existing expectations and opinions will be taken seriously. We would recommend, therefore, that these questions be addressed with a view to identifying ethically sound responses to them.

#### 6.4.2. Equality and Inclusion – Survey findings

One of the questions asked of recipients of the questionnaire is relevant to the issue of equality/inclusion. Recipients who indicated that they do consult with children and young people were asked to specify whether they consulted with children and young people experiencing or at risk of poverty or other forms of social exclusion. As the findings presented in Table 1 below suggest, the organisations surveyed have a remit to consult with these children and young people. While some responding organisations characterised their remit as being to consult with “all children and young people”, the majority of responding organisations have a role to play in safeguarding the needs and rights of particular groups of disadvantaged children/young people.

**Table 1**  
Children/Young People who have been consulted with

	%
• Children/young people experiencing or at risk of poverty/socio-economic disadvantage (n=31)	52
• Children/young people in the Traveller community (n=27)	45
• Children/young people with disabilities (n=19)	32
• Children/young people who are out of home (n=17)	28
• Children/young people with literacy difficulties (n=24)	40
• Children/young people from cultural/ethnic minorities (n=15)	25

It is interesting to note that organisations that do consult with children and young people do so on behalf of children and young with particular physical, emotional, social and economic needs. Voluntary and statutory organisations are equally matched in their remit to consult children and young people experiencing poverty and/or other forms of social exclusion. However, this does not mean that their voices are being heard beyond the organisation. As one respondent noted:

“No direct consultation [with children and young people]. However, NAPS consultations are open to all members of the public and representative groups gave an input through calls for submissions and the partnership process.”

### 6.4.3. Equality and Inclusion – Interview findings

With regard to equality and inclusion, several interviewees characterised existing opportunities for children and young people to be consulted in Ireland as exclusive in terms of the number and/or the diversity of children and young people involved. A number of interviewees posited that disadvantaged children and young people were least likely to be involved in existing consultative events or process. Others expressed a concern that children and young people experiencing poverty or other forms of social exclusion will be excluded in future unless purposeful efforts are made to provide for their equitable inclusion.

Several interviewees also spoke to the practical and/or ethical difficulties of a pragmatic approach to inclusion and of seeking to involve children and young people from particular socially excluded groups. They questioned and problematised the practice of identifying a child or young person for involvement in the terms of their marginalised status – for example, as a child/young person ‘with a disability’ or as a child/young person ‘out of home’. One interviewee recognised the potential for tokenism entailed in a targeted approach to (s)electing participants for involvement in integrated children’s fora, positing the desirability of finding an alternative approach to this quota system. Another interviewee argued that it will be necessary to retain this targeted approach in the short- to medium-term to ensure that disadvantaged children and young people are included.

### Equality and Inclusion: Access

- “There are loads of young people out there who aren’t being asked ... You have to look at those kids who can’t read or write, who can’t express their opinions in a group, in a forum, in a small group ... The same people tend to get asked ... If you go to a school and say ... you’re putting together a committee of young people ... the school will ... want to represent the school well ... We need to look at ... broadening that and trying to get a cross-section of young people” – *Health Board practitioner*
- “We would work with quite a marginalised group of young people out of home. They’re quite reticent, I think, to get involved at any level ... because their experiences ... are that they’re very marginalised and they haven’t been consulted. So, to try to get them in is quite difficult ... There’s not much content around their voices to date ... Their voice needs to get in there ... [But] I don’t think a lot of young people would like to see themselves identified as ‘homeless’” – *Practitioner working with young people out of home*
- “... unless you specifically name Travellers as a group, they are left out ... Until Travellers as a community ... [are] included equally, ... you won’t get that group’s contribution at all ... It’s connected with how you ... enable young people to be comfortable ... I think initially we really need to target ... if we want to be inclusive” – *Pavee Point representative*
- “The fear of tokenism ... We *have* to get two people from the Traveller community. We *have* to get two people from disabilities ... It’s very, very difficult ... to make the selection process equal ... I think it’s definitely something that needs to be ... looked at ... Article 12 [states that] every child has the right ... to have a voice. But ... we’re ... selecting ... a mere handful ... There has to be an alternative to it” – *Children’s consultation officer*



- “I think it is the young people who had more chances and basically more money ... who are ... those young people who are heard at the end of the day ... That does need to be redressed ... There are a lot of young people who are so disenfranchised and so marginalised ... I do think the representative model is pragmatic ... Because a young person is a Traveller, are they speaking for young Travellers? They could also be disabled. They could also be Romanian ... There’s a whole load of things that a person carries ... So, it’s a bit simplistic and ... dangerous ... [C]hildren’s and young people’s views aren’t entirely formed yet anyway. It’s far better if they can just speak from their own perspective ... I think we can ... create opportunities for young people to participate without necessarily putting one young person up there to represent a group” – *Representative from the voluntary youth sector*
- “I would prefer to think that they would be there as ‘young people’, not as ‘young people with a disability’ ... What would worry me is that ... you’ll get the highly motivated, highly articulate group coming into it quite quickly ... I don’t think they [children with disabilities] will be truly part of it ... for a number of years to come” – *Practitioner working with children and young people with physical disabilities*
- “I would have a concern around ... if we have a children’s forum, who’s on it? ... And ... I would have a major concern that we’ll have the children of middle class people ... and the children who get all the breaks anyway sitting there and that socially excluded children won’t participate, won’t feel they can participate ... I think we just need to take time ... I have a major concern about having a mass of children’s fora up and running tomorrow because I think we would run a major risk of having only one set of children’s views represented” – *Community Enterprise and Development Officer with a Local Authority*

Interviewees also spoke to the issue of equality and inclusion at the level of involvement. Their comments in this regard focused on the group settings within which and through which children and young people might be enabled to contribute to public policy development. One public policy-maker at national level simply underscored the importance of ensuring that suitable settings and mechanisms are developed to facilitate children’s and young people’s involvement: “There’s a big onus on the person going to consult to ... provide mechanisms and playing fields on which people can make that contribution.” Most interviewees, however, went further, addressing the kinds of group settings that might be created and developed. There were differences of view among interviewees as regards whether integrated group settings such as national and local children’s/young people’s fora would enable children and young people experiencing or at risk of social exclusion to participate on an equal footing with their peers. Several interviewees expressed doubts about this, with a Pavee Point representative suggesting that it might be more enabling and hence more appropriate in the short-term to consult with young Travellers in a segregated setting. Others, however, placed an emphasis on providing the necessary supports to enable socially excluded children and young people to contribute on an equal footing within integrated group settings. A small number of interviewees suggested that it would ultimately be more beneficial to these children and young people and children and young people generally to be consulted in integrated group settings. In this regard, one public policy-maker at national level suggested that this approach might function as a corrective to discriminatory and prejudicial attitudes among children and young people. He also stressed the need for subtlety in providing any necessary additional supports to marginalised children and young people, suggesting that a failure to do so might promote discriminatory attitudes among children and young people.

#### **Equality and Inclusion: Involvement**

- “I think ... it would have to be very imaginative in looking at the way to include them [young people out of home] and for them to feel that they are included in it ... [T]hings like Dáil na nÓg. That needs to be looked at and how you get more marginalised young people involved in that. You can’t just bring along three people to a context that you know they

might find very intimidating or ... threatening ... Because they would find it difficult. A lot of young people we would work with [would be] quite intimidated in a ... formal setting where there are young people who are very articulate ... You don't want to bring them into something like that and then they have a very bad experience of it ... Certainly I didn't feel comfortable bringing some of our young people to Dáil na nÓg the last time in that I didn't know what the experience would be like for them and I couldn't really ... identify somebody who I thought, no matter how it goes, they'll be fine" – *Practitioner working with young people out of home*

- "There's ... that power difference ... Young Travellers are ... already coming with that baggage of feeling 'Well, I'm a second class citizen' ... So work needs to be done in terms of [establishing] an equal relationship ... between Travellers and a settled person ... That needs time to be developed ... For the young Travellers [who participated in the focus group consultation for this study], it was quite important to them that they did it in their own group because they felt they would be listened to... What's clear to me is that they are much more comfortable and feel ... they'll be listened to as a group [if they are consulted alongside other young Travellers]" – *Pavee Point representative*
- "For instance, in relation to [X children's forum, there was an] issue of ... '[X] children can't participate in the [forum] because it's not an environment in which they can flourish' ... But if you say 'Well, then they don't do that', then you're excluding them automatically ... Some adults ... underestimate what some kids are actually capable of. I've heard people saying 'We need special arrangements for this particular group.' And we'd go some way to try and help that ... Part of the preparation is to make sure that kids who mightn't feel that comfortable are made to feel comfortable about the process because otherwise all you're going to get is the articulate kids that will get up time and again ... And if they're the ones that take control of the situation, it means that other voices are drowned out ... You can stultify the process by saying 'OK ... the school child talks first ... And then we'll have a girl. And then we'll get a refugee ...' I would be quite concerned that that would give subliminal messages to children about the value that we place. Because they may see that you make special arrangements for children with disabilities. Do they understand that? Are they seeing that that child is somehow different and needs to be treated separately? Which creates a society that discriminates because ... you don't discriminate against people that are like you. You discriminate against people that aren't like you. So, you have to be subtle about it as well" – *Public policy-maker at national level*
- "I think that the inclusion piece and making it more real would be" enabling children with disabilities to be consulted in an integrated setting because in this way they might be enabled to feel 'Yes, I am part of a community'" – *Practitioner working with children and young people with physical disabilities*
- "The benefit of something like a children's forum is the richness ... the diversity it could bring" – *Community Enterprise and Development Officer with Local Authority*

Three interviewees also broached the issue of consulting children/young people and adults in an integrated setting. Each saw this as desirable, with one interviewee suggesting that links ought to be forged between adult and children's fora at local level. While supportive of an integrated approach to consultation with children/young people and adults, another interviewee acknowledged the difficulties that can and do arise in this regard. In so doing, this interviewee made reference to the National Children's Advisory Council (which currently includes three young people) and briefly addressed the idea of involving socially excluded children and young people in existing adult fora with a remit around one or more poverty and/or social exclusion issues.

### Integration Consultation with Children/Young People and Adults

- "I think you need to link the two together ... I think that young people need to hear what adults are saying and likewise adults need to hear what young people are saying" – *Health Board practitioner*

- “Social inclusion areas are areas where the political system is in more robust dialogue ... That relationship at adult level is very fraught ... There’s a very difficult dynamic there which we as adults can manage and it’s important you don’t bring socially excluded kids into that dynamic because that could be a disaster ... So, I think it should be done, but there’s a challenge as to how you do it ... [As regards] the National Children’s Advisory Council ... difficulties ... arise in terms of just having young people there in an adult setting ... There are clearly major issues about their [young people’s] understanding of the dialogue that’s going on around the table ... I think there are issues around how you facilitate that. And I think that’s work that needs to be done ... Because, you see, if you’re going to really make an impact, that’s the sort of group you want [children/young people] to get involved in” – *Public policy-maker at national level*
- “If the children’s forum was directly linked to the community forum, then we could have that cross-dialogue ... It’s to ... create the links with the adults that’s important” – *Community and Enterprise Development Officer with Local Authority*

Interviewees also raised the issue of equality and inclusion at the level of outcome when they offered their perspectives on what ‘taking on board’ children’s views might, could and/or should mean. Their views on this matter have already been presented in Chapter Three, section 3.2.

#### **6.4.4. Equality and Inclusion – What Children and Young People say**

Participating children and young people were not asked a specific question relating to equality/inclusion at the levels of access to or involvement in a consultative process or event. However, during the course of five of the ten focus groups, one or more participants spoke directly or indirectly to the issue of whether they would prefer to be consulted in a) an integrated group setting, b) a segregated group setting or c) a segregated group setting within an integrated group setting. Participants tended to state their preferences in terms of the children and young people they would like to be consulted with. Their views are presented below under the heading of ‘involvement’. Participants were asked a question relating to the treatment of children’s and young people’s views. Prompted by the notion that “due weight” should be accorded to children’s and young people’s voices/views, the question aimed to elicit participants’ views on the weight that should be accorded to children’s and young people’s opinions.

##### **Involvement**

Only one of the five focus groups in which children and young people raised the issue of who they would like to be consulted with saw the issue evolve into a discussion. In the other four focus groups, the views of the nine participants who spoke to this issue took the form of passing remarks articulated in the context of responding to another question. Of the nine participants, five were members of the same focus group and there was consensus among them that they would enjoy meeting new people as long as the consultation was held in a venue that they knew. Three other participants, two of whom were young Travellers, also said that they would welcome the opportunity to meet new people. However, in another focus comprising young Travellers, there was consensus among participants that they would prefer to be consulted alongside other Travellers. This group also asserted that, if they were to be consulted alongside settled children/young people, they would like to be able to choose who these children/young people are. The following is an excerpt from the conversation that took place:

Assistant: "Would you be happy enough to be contacted through school?"

2 Participants: "No."

Assistant: "Why not?"

1 Participant: "Because you wouldn't want to stand out in front of all the other ... settled girls."

Assistant: "Why?"

1 Participant: "Because some people don't get on with settled people and settled people don't like Travellers. It would just end up in a big row."

Assistant: Would it be OK to go into the class and pick three settled girls and three Travellers?

1 Participant: "It depends how long you knew them ... If you know them, like. If you're going to go along ... with them, you know what they're like and you'd like it if they came along. Where, if you just met them ... you don't really know ... are they against them [Travellers] or something?"

Assistant: Do you know who in your class from the settled community you would prefer to be in a group with you?

Participants: "Yeah"

Facilitator: Would you prefer to choose the people in your group?

Participants: "Yeah"

1 Participant: "Pick the people you'd like to come with you."

Participants: We would not be comfortable speaking/giving our opinions in front of a class comprising young Travellers and settled children/young people because they don't understand or know about us. We would be more comfortable speaking in front of a class comprising solely of Travellers.

*Note: Text in quotation marks represents direct speech. Other text constitutes paraphrase.*

In light of this conversation, the reason one child gave for not wanting to be consulted in a school setting is particularly stark, exhibitively as it is of the prejudice against Travellers that these young Travellers were referring to: "Because all the Travellers an' all, they'd come in and they'd wreck it." While it cannot and ought not to be assumed that these findings are representative, we would suggest that the existence of such views/attitudes need to be kept in mind by those planning to consult a diversity of children and young people on a given public policy issue.

### **Treatment of Views**

Participants in each of the focus groups were asked whether they felt that their views should carry more, the same or less weight as those of adults consulted on the same issue. In response:

- 9 participants said more weight
- 24 participants said the same weight
- 1 participant said less weight
- 4 participants said the same or less weight, depending on who the adults involved were (i.e. children's/young people's views should carry less weight than adults when the adults in question are their parents/guardians and the same weight when the adults in question are non-family members)

- 6 participants said the same or less weight, depending on the age of the children and young people being consulted (i.e. two participants said that children from 7 years up should have equal weight accorded to their views and those under 7 years less weight while four participants came to the same conclusion, but identified the threshold as 10 years of age)
- 6 participants made no comment
- Precise numbers are not available in relation to one of the focus groups, in which twelve young people participated. However, their comments are included among the quotations presented below.

The reasons given by participants are presented below, with direct quotations used where possible.

### **Treatment of Children's and Young People's Views**

#### **More Weight**

- "I think it's more serious than adults ... It's up to the children and the teenagers ... because they're the ones ... who are going to be using those facilities"
- "Probably more seriously", depending on the issue
- Because the experience of being consulted is very important for later life
- "Because it's in the best interests of the kids"
- Because "they're the ones using it [the service]"
- "I think children should be listened to more than adults"
- "Now I don't know if all of you would agree with me, but I think a child's choice would be a better one than an adult's choice"

#### **Same Weight**

- For many participants, especially younger participants, having their views afforded equal weight was a matter of fairness
- Children's and young people's views should be treated as equal to those of adults because the plan/service being developed is for them. However, "all the responsibility shouldn't be put on children"
- "Because it's for you. It's not for them"
- "In a matter of opinion ... it should be the same as everybody else's"
- "fairly seriously, the same as an adult"
- "They should be treated the same ... It's the same as like black people or white people: they should be treated the same"
- "We should be all treated as equals"
- "I don't think they would, but they should" (re: policy-makers/planners affording equal weight to children's/young people's views)
- "Treat us the same, but in a different way", i.e. it should be assumed that children and young people may put forward "outlandish" ideas at times, but policy-makers and others should afford them equal weight by considering whether and how such ideas might be rendered practicable
- Try and strike a balance between adults' and young people's views
- Aim to incorporate the ideas of adults and young people
- Opinions of children/young people are just as important as those of adults and "should be treated the same"

#### **Less Weight**

- "... the kids might think of stuff that's been already done whereas the adults would think of other, new stuff"
- "It's going to go on the age group ... If you're a child, you don't know what you're saying. You're just saying anything. Where you're an adult, you know what you're saying"
- "Underneath it [10 years of age] ... they're not sensible. They won't know ... what to do"

## 6.5. RESPECT and INTEGRITY

### 6.5.1. Respect and Integrity – What the Literature says

Treating participating children/young people with respect is a given as far as ethical practice is concerned. The question that arises is: How can respect be demonstrated? We would suggest that the manner the ethical issues discussed above are addressed will play an important role in demonstrating to children and young people that they are being respected. The approach taken to other key issues presented in this report will also be significant. Simple things such as ensuring that children/young people involved in a consultation are provided with sufficient breaks and quality refreshments and that the consultation is held in a comfortable setting can contribute to making children/young people feel that they are being respected. There are also more nuanced ways in which respect can be demonstrated: the language and tone in which children and young people are communicated with by facilitators and the way in which their comments are received by facilitators (i.e. in a non-judgemental way) will play a part in determining whether children/young people feel that they are being respected or patronised.

Integrity may be less easy to demonstrate, but is just as essential to ethical practice. Perhaps the key point in this regard is to acknowledge the naïvety with which some children and young people will participate in a consultation and that their responses can be symptomatic of a desire to please and/or the need for attention. Each of these elements is vulnerable to manipulation and exploitation. For example, if consulting children and young people is to mean no more than a commitment to hear what they have to say in good faith, then this should be communicated at the outset to offset any naïve expectation participants might have that their views/ideas will be implemented on foot of being articulated. While this meaning of consultation may disappoint some children and young people and perhaps prompt them to decide not to participate, a failure to provide such an explanation can be characterised as exploitative and manipulative. Another example arises in relation to the evaluation stage of a consultation process. In evaluating a consultation, a child or young person may praise most or all aspects of it because they do not wish to offend or upset the organisers. That this may be the reason for a very positive evaluation may be overlooked by organisers keen to view the consultation as a success. To help safeguard against such eventualities, we would recommend that those involved in future consultative work with children/young people should be made aware of such eventualities. They should also be encouraged to be honest and upfront at all times and to encourage participating children/young people to be the same.

### 6.5.2. Respect and Integrity – Interview findings

Two interviewees spoke briefly about the importance of integrity when they posited the need to be honest with children and young people, in particular with regard to the expectations they should have:

*“One of the things is being open and honest ... being clear and using accessible language ...: ‘This is what we can do. This is what we’ve got and we want you to get involved in it and we need to look at ways that we can do that’.” – Pavee Point representative*

*“Don’t lie ... We can’t change the world ... We are not the policy-makers ... If we’re going out ... asking questions on behalf of different agencies ... we can’t say to a child: ‘Yeah, that’s going to happen’.” – Children’s consultation officer*

## 6.6. Implications

Key implications and recommendations relating to the ethical practice are presented below.

### Consent

- With regard to consent from parents/guardians, the following issues warrant consideration:
  - What consent should be sought for in the context of consulting children and young people in relation to public policy development
  - Who to seek consent from in the event that the parent/guardian of a child or young person is not available or able to give consent for one or more reasons
  - Who to seek consent from in the case of children/young people in residential care and children/young people out of home
  - Whether there may be instances when an initial refusal of consent from a parent/guardian or other adult might be re-negotiated and/or over-ridden in cases where a child/young person has indicated a wish to be consulted.
- With regard to consent from children and young people, the following issues need to be addressed
  - Promoting the principle of voluntary participation among children/young people, their parents/guardians and other relevant professionals
  - The status of seeking formal consent from children/young people as a principle of ethical good practice in the context of consulting children/young people in relation to public policy development
  - The scope for seeking consent from children/young people in light of children's and young people's competency to give informed consent and the question of how and by whom their competency might be established
  - Stages during the consultative process as a whole when children/young people should be afforded opportunities to re-confirm or withdraw consent.
- Methods/mechanisms for seeking formal consent from parents/guardians and/or children/young people.

### Confidentiality

- Careful consideration should be given to the status of confidentiality as an ethical touchstone of good practice as regards consulting children and young people in relation to public policy development.
- If consensus is reached on its status as such, then awareness raising on the importance of confidentiality is needed among all those involved in future consultations with children and young people in relation to public policy.
- It will be desirable to arrive at consensus on:
  - The meaning of confidentiality in the context of public policy development – when should it mean confidentiality or “public confidentiality” (anonymity/quasi-anonymity)?
  - Where confidentiality is being practiced, who should be afforded access to the identity of participating children/young people and/or their contributions
  - Whether children and young people should be afforded the choice of whether information provided by them is to be treated in confidence and, if it is not, the choice of what form of confidentiality their contributions should be subject to.
- It will be important to explain to children/young people the rules that have been agreed about confidentiality in relation to a particular consultation.
- Awareness raising is needed around the issue of “network confidentiality” and how to address it.
- In light of *Children First* and *Our Duty to Care*, consensus is needed on whether mandatory reporting should be operational in the context of consulting children and young people in relation to public policy development.

**Transparency**

- Awareness raising is needed on:
  - What information children/young people should be provided with
  - At what stages they should be provided with one or more pieces of information
  - Formats in which to provide information to children/young people.

**Equality and Inclusion**

- It will be necessary to identify and provide for ethical approaches to equality/inclusion at the levels of:
  - Access to consultative processes/events;
  - Involvement in consultative processes/events;
  - Outcome of consultative processes/events (treatment of children's and young people's views).
- In terms of providing for the equitable involvement of children/young people at risk of or experiencing poverty or other forms of social exclusion, careful thought must be given to whether it will be more appropriate to consult with them in integrated settings or segregated settings. The findings of the focus groups with children and young people suggest that it will be desirable to negotiate the setting with children/young people.

**Respect and Integrity**

- Awareness raising is needed on ways of demonstrating respect to children and young people.
- It will be important to promote the importance of integrity and honesty at all stages of a consultation involving children and young people.



## Chapter Seven: Additional Planning Issues

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### Introduction

The issues addressed in Chapters Three to Six of this report are all planning issues under other names: what 'consultation' means or ought to mean, arguments for and against consulting children/young people, resource matters and ethical considerations are all issues that need to be addressed at the planning stage of consultation. While most of the topics broached in these chapters warrant consideration at a macro level and in relation to whether and how to fashion a culture within which children's and young people's voices are structurally embedded in relevant public policy-making processes, many of the issues discussed also need to be considered at a micro level, i.e. in relation to specific consultations involving children and young people.

The aim of this chapter is to draw attention to three additional planning matters that also merit consideration at a macro level and/or a micro level. These are:

- Direct and indirect consultation with children and young people
- Legal and protection issues arising in relation to consultation with children and young people
- Making contact with children and young people.

These issues are briefly discussed with reference to one or more of the four elements of the research undertaken for this study – the literature review, the survey of and interviews with policy-makers and practitioners as well as the focus groups with children and young people. As with previous chapters, we conclude by identifying a number of implications and recommendations arising from the findings.

### 7.1. Direct or indirect Consultation with Children and Young People?

#### 7.1.1. Direct or indirect Consultation? – What the Literature says

The use of advocates to consult with and represent the views and interests of children and young people is an emerging or established practice in a number of areas – for example, in the context of legal proceedings involving children (Guardian ad Litem services) and placement reviews for children in care. However, in the area of public policy development both in and beyond Ireland, it remains the case that the rights, needs and interests of children and young people, including those experiencing or at risk of poverty or other forms of social exclusion, are advocated by representative organisations and adult professionals whose role is to promote a child-centred approach to a given public policy issue or development. In some cases, representative organisations and adult professionals do consult with children and young people themselves during the preparation of their position on a given issue. For example, the Children's Law Centre in Northern Ireland has established a young people's committee - [youth@clc](mailto:youth@clc) - for this purpose while Save the Children's advocacy work in relation to different areas of public policy frequently entails consultation with children and young people and the incorporation of their voices and views into Save the Children submissions/reports. However, in cases where submissions, proposals or recommendations have been prepared in consultation with children/young people, it will be unclear to an outside eye what degree of influence the children's/young people's contributions will have had on the decision-making process relating to the final content of such documents. While the reports on the public consultation that took place in relation to the *National Children's Strategy*, for example, afforded considerable space to the representation of participating children's and young people's observations, views and ideas, the extent to which these influenced the decision-making process relating to the content of the Strategy is ultimately a matter of speculation.

It remains the case that the majority of organisations working with and/or on behalf of children and young people in Ireland do not consult with children and young people in a quasi-formal way during the preparation of their submissions, proposals or recommendations in relation to areas of public policy affecting these children and young people. While there might be any number of reasons for this, including lack of adequate resources, it is likely that uncertainty or scepticism about the need to do so will have some role to play in this. As O'Leary points out in her mapping study for the Carnegie Young People Initiative, adult scepticism regarding children's and young people's competency as commentators and contributors is a matter of degree and at its most entrenched in relation to 'higher' or 'macro' levels of decision-making, including external and political decision-making. Correspondingly, the assertion that children and young people can make germane contributions at the level of public policy is far more likely to meet with incredulity than the contention that children and young people can input in a meaningful way into internal decision-making relating to service-provision: "Health Boards and other organisations ... often stated that there was a limit to the *level* of decisions a young person should be involved in."<sup>126</sup>

Goal One of the *National Children's Strategy* includes a brief reference to the matter of direct and/or indirect consultation with children and young people:

"Opportunities for effective participation in decision-making can be either direct or mediated. It is important to take account of the age and capacity of children in designing specific measures and prioritising the need for direct participation."<sup>127</sup>

As the second part of this excerpt evokes, just as "there may be occasions when ... involvement may be exploitative or manipulative",<sup>128</sup> so there are likely to be occasions when it will be appropriate to consult with children and young people directly and others where it may be more appropriate to consult with them indirectly, i.e. to consult only with their representative organisations or to consult with them through their representative organisations. In light of this and the fact that pros and cons attach to both direct and indirect consultation,<sup>129</sup> we would suggest that consideration ought to be given at a macro level, and in particular by the National Children's Office and the National Children's Advisory Council, to the following questions:

- When and on what grounds might *direct* consultation be more appropriate in the context of public policy development?
- When and on what grounds might *indirect* consultation be more appropriate?
- When and on what grounds might it be more appropriate to consult *only* with representative organisations of children and young people?
- When and on what grounds might it be more appropriate to consult indirectly with children and young people *through* their representative organisations?

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<sup>126</sup> O'Leary (2001), p. 58.

<sup>127</sup> Government of Ireland (2000), p. 31.

<sup>128</sup> Roberts (2001), p. 225.

<sup>129</sup> While his discussion of advocacy and the use of advocates pertains to consultation with geographic communities, Chambers' engagement with this theme and consideration of the pros and cons that arise in relation to direct and indirect consultation in the context of public policy development is a useful text. See Chambers, R., *Whose Reality Counts? Putting the First Last* (London: Intermediate Technologies Publications, 1998). Another text engaged with during the literature review provides a useful synopsis of some key issues arising in relation to advocacy and does so in relation to the representation of children and young people with special needs. See Arthurs, M., *Working with Participation. No. 2: Partners in Advocacy: Enabling the Participation of Children with Special Needs through Citizen Advocacy* (Edinburgh: Children in Scotland, 1998).

- Might legitimate grounds for indirect consultation include, for example, age, capacity or the theme of a given public policy initiative in relation to which consultation is taking place?
- If such grounds are legitimate, should efforts be made to ascertain whether a decision to consult with representative organisations only and/or by a representative organisation not to consult with the children/young people it works on behalf of is being made in good faith?
- In the case of indirect consultation where children and young people are consulted through their representative organisations, how might organisations be supported to act both faithfully and strategically on behalf of the children and young people they have consulted?

### 7.1.2. Direct or indirect Consultation? – Survey findings

One of the questions asked of survey recipients is relevant to the issue of direct and indirect consultation. The question aimed to ascertain from organisations the frequency with which organisations currently consult with children and young people at different levels of decision-making. Tables 1 and 2 below present the findings for voluntary and statutory organisations respectively.

**Table 1**

Frequency with which voluntary organisations consult with children/young people in relation to different levels of organisational decision-making

	Level / %			
	Operational	Managerial	Political	Financial
Frequency				
Most often	41	0	0	0
Often	27	22	21	17
Sometimes	27	28	15	17
Not Often	5	33	32	33
Never	0	17	32	33
Total (%)	100	100	100	100
Total (No.)	22	18	19	18

**Table 2**

Frequency with which statutory organisations consult with children/young people at different levels of organisational decision-making

	Level / %			
	Operational	Managerial	Political	Financial
Frequency				
Most often	21	0	17	0
Often	26	20	11	6
Sometimes	26	20	22	27
Not Often	16	25	11	6
Never	11	35	39	61
Total (%)	100	100	100	100
Total (No.)	19	20	18	18

As Tables 1 and 2 indicate, 41% of voluntary organisations and 21% of statutory organisations 'most often' consult with children and young people at 'operational' level. At the 'managerial level', 17% of voluntary organisations and 35% of statutory organisations *never* consult with children and young people. At the 'financial' level, 33% of voluntary organisations and 61% of statutory bodies *never* consult with children and young people. As regards organisations consulting with children and young people at a political level, the results, while not surprising, are likely to be disappointing to those promoting children's and young people's

involvement at higher levels of decision-making. 32% of voluntary organisations and 39% of statutory organisations *never* consult with children and young people at this level.

## **7.2. Legal and Protection Issues**

### **7.2.1. Legal and Protection Issues – What the Literature says**

The literature reviewed for this research study did not yield information on or discussion of whether and, if so, what legal issues can or might arise in relation to one or more aspects of consulting children and young people at the level of public policy development. However, it is the case in Ireland that, in the interests of child protection, direct work with children and young people is subject to increasingly stringent requirements and procedures, with organisations having to establish policies and practices to protect the needs of both children and young people and those who work with them. We recommend that the legal aspects of consultation with children and young people in relation to and at the level of public policy development warrant a separate piece of targeted research by an individual or group of individuals with expertise and/or with access to expertise on the relevant aspects of Irish law and legislation. We recommend that this piece of research would aim to address the following questions:

- Are there one or more aspects/stages of consultation with children and young people at the level of public policy that might be vulnerable to litigation?
- What, if any, measures are required to prevent just cause(s) for litigation and to safeguard against any threat of litigation should it arise?

We also recommend that this piece of research should address the following related issues:

- Garda clearance and the scope for expanding existing provisions in this area to include all individuals who may be involved in working directly with children/young people in the context of consultation, including consultation relating to public policy development
- Mandatory reporting and the question of whether it should be operational in the context of consultation with children and young people, including in relation to public policy development
- Insurance, i.e. when it will be necessary to take out insurance or additional insurance, what kinds of insurance or additional insurance are required under a given set of circumstances.

This piece of research should include any necessary recommendations. Subject to their approval at a macro level (for example, by the Department of Health and Children, the Cabinet Sub-Committee on Children, the National Children's Office and/or the National Children's Advisory Council), these recommendations should be widely disseminated in accessible formats to all relevant organisations and individuals.

Research of this kind will help to ensure that good practice in this area evolves in such a way that children's and young people's protection rights are not undermined by the advancement of their participation rights and, equally, that children's and young people's participation rights are not unnecessarily curtailed by efforts to safeguard their protection rights.

### **7.2.2. Legal and Protection Issues – Interview findings**

Two interviewees spoke directly about the legal and protection issues identified above. A public policy-maker at national level stressed the importance of ensuring adequate provision for and levels of child protection and subsequently raised the matters of insurance and parental consent in this regard. As the following quotation indicates, this interviewee was of the opinion that, while children's and young people's safety must be safeguarded, the legal

implications of consulting children and young people need not be a major concern to organisations as long they are aware of and have the necessary bases covered:

“[In relation to child protection], you need to look at where guidance is needed and where in depth and where broad guidelines are appropriate ... Some guidance [is needed] ... about protection ... Simple things like ‘Make sure that ... you know who’s in the room’ ... If you ... cover your bases like that, you’re reasonably safe ... [C]ertainly Public Liability Insurance ... [I]f you’re giving out advice [about the legal aspects] ... I think your answer is in two parts, ... a bit about the checklists you need to go through ... [and] get the legal advice ... Consent is a huge issue here ... Getting actual consent forms signed by parents ... If you’re deciding you’re going to consult with children ... you need to say ... ‘What do we want to find out? What is the best environment to find that out in?’ Try and keep ... as much as possible within the school context ... You need to be sensible about this and minimise your risk by the way you do it. And that’s really just common sense” – *Public policy-maker at national level*

The second interviewee broached the legal/protection issues discussed above to the extent of stressing the importance of securing consent from parents/guardians and alluding to the issue of mandatory reporting:

“... parental permission is crucial for everything we do with children. We adhere to mandatory reporting ... [and] it’s only fair that parents are aware of that ... By them giving us their permission for us to speak directly to their children, I suppose it’s a way ... of ensuring ... that we are covered.” – *Children’s consultation officer*

## **7.3. Making Contact with Children and Young People**

### **7.3.1. Making Contact – What the Literature says**

The issue of making contact with or gaining access to children and young people is ultimately the flipside of the issue of giving children and young people access to consultation. As such and given that the issue of access was discussed in Chapter Six (section 6.4.), we will limit our discussion of this issue to two points.

The first concerns the importance of identifying contact routes that are safe for *and* acceptable to children and young people. Schools, for example, have been and are likely to continue to be identified as safe routes for accessing potentially large numbers of children and young people. However, this route may not be acceptable to particular children/young people for one or more reasons (see, for example, Chapter Six, section 6.4.4.). If and when this proves to be the case, it may result in these children/young people being reluctant or refusing to become involved. In other words, the acceptability of a given mode or route of making contact to children and young people themselves has the potential to be something of a make-or-break issue as regards securing their voluntary involvement.

The second issue with regard to making contact that warrants consideration is the way in which adults can act as gatekeepers and for reasons that may or may not be bound up first and foremost with a concern for the best interests of the children and young people in their care. Adult professionals and organisations working in sectors that might be identified as potential contact routes (schools, youth centres, NGOs working directly with children/young people) may refuse contact with children and young people because, for example:

- They do not think that the children/young people in their care will be interested in being consulted
- They do not believe that the children/young people in their care will be able to make a useful or meaningful contribution
- They do not feel that children/young people should be consulted at this level

- They do not consider it appropriate to consult with children/young people on a given public policy issue
- They are concerned that accommodating a request of this nature will be an inconvenience to them
- They are afraid that what the children/young people in their care might say could be critical of them
- They consider that their status as representatives of children and young people is being undermined by an attempt to consult directly with the children and young people.

Ascertaining that one or more of these possible causes for refusal are the reasons behind a given negative response to assist can be difficult. Moreover, if one or more of these reasons are furnished to account for a negative response, it may not be possible to re-negotiate with the refusing party. As such, a preventive approach is needed which discourages adults from acting as gatekeepers for reasons that are not immediately bound up with the best interests of the children/young people in their care. We would suggest that this situation will ultimately be redressed by creating a culture in which children's/young people's voices and right to be heard are respected. Given the current situation in Ireland, doing so will take time. The researchers would suggest, therefore, that what is needed is a purposeful and sustained commitment at macro level to promote awareness and understanding of children's and young people's *right* to be heard.

### **7.3.2. Making contact – Interview findings**

One interviewee spoke directly to the issue of making contact with children and young people. Speaking to the issue as a policy-maker at local level and thus from the position of someone with mediated access to children and young people, this interviewee raised the issue of adults acting as gatekeepers through the filter of previous experience. By so doing, the interviewee reinforced the status of this issue as real rather than hypothetical:

*"We would have tried to consult with children ... One of the difficulties is that we would have called a consultation meeting around youth, sent out a notice to youth clubs and things like that. And the leaders came. And they never brought children ... We were meeting the leaders at the community forum and we were meeting them on working groups ... We knew what they had to say. We wanted to know what the kids they were working with had to say ... And that was very, very frustrating and it was very difficult ... There seemed to be a reluctance by the youth workers to allow the children to speak ... I really don't know, but my feeling is that maybe the youth workers were afraid ... they were being undermined" – Community and Enterprise Development Officer with a Local Authority*

While presented as speculation, the above account does suggest that it will be preferable for the 'adults as gatekeepers' issue to be addressed in a manner that does not preclude the possibility that even those whose professional role directly or indirectly entails the empowerment of children/young people might act in this way.

### **7.3.3. Making Contact – What Children and Young People say**

Participants' responses to the question of how best to make contact with them were recorded in such a way as to enable the researchers to determine what, if any, trends might emerge in relation to the children's and young people's conception of good places to make contact with them. The following places were identified as possible contact points by participants in more than one of the ten focus groups:

- School
- Community-based services attended by children and young people
- Home, through parents/guardians
- Public advertisements
- Internet and email.

Of these contact points, community-based services for children/young people and schools were those most often identified. Participants frequently named community-based NGO services, in particular the setting in which the consultation they were participating in for this study was taking place. Other community-based settings/services named were:

- Community centres, including those attached to the local parish church
- Libraries
- Youth clubs
- Family centres
- GP surgeries
- Town halls, especially in cases where local councils have established a youth parliament or equivalent
- Sports centres, including local swimming pools, attended by children and young people.

In relation to these settings, one focus group suggested that a network of children's/youth councils should be established from local community through to county level. The group saw this as a way of enabling as many children and young people as possible to contribute at the grass-roots level and as many children's and young people's views/ideas as possible to filter through to county level.

Upon analysis of the findings, it was interesting to find that participants were divided on the status of schools as a 'good' contact point, with a number of children and young people responding to the question asked by saying 'not school'. While the time available precluded in depth discussion with participants as to their reasons for naming certain contact points, several participants explained their choices. The following explanations were given regarding the status of schools as a good or, alternatively, as a bad contact point:

**Schools 'good'**

- Making contact through schools would make sense at second level in light of the CSPE course.
- Schools are the best places to make contact because most children and young people attend school. Put posters up in the school advertising the consultation so that students can decide whether they wish to attend or have someone "coming into the classroom asking".
- One group of young Travellers asserted that making contact through schools would be alright if the class in question comprised Travellers only.
- "... so the teacher can hear and know what I mean".
- Schools are a good contact point so long as potential participants in the consultation are not selected by the school authorities (principals and/or teachers). It will be preferable to go through student councils in those schools where these have been established.

**Schools 'not good'/'bad'**

- "... teachers might get confused and ... you're interrupting our education"
- "... not through school because it would disrupt our school work"
- The same group of young Travellers mentioned above did not like the idea of contact being made with them through their schools if this would entail their being requested to participate in a consultation within a mixed school/classroom setting. With one exception, all participants in a second focus group with young Travellers did not identify school as a 'good' contact point either.

Home was identified as a good contact point by participants in four of the focus groups. Two of these focus groups comprised young Travellers who identified community centres and/or other services on Traveller sites as good contact points for seeking the involvement of young Travellers. Participants in these two focus groups also suggested that NGOs working with/for the Traveller community would be an acceptable contact point. Reflecting, perhaps, their status as younger children, participants in a third focus group identified home and/or their parents/guardians as a good contact point because it would be safe for children.

Participants in three focus groups all suggested that advertising through the media and/or in public places might be a good way of making contact. In this regard, the following were suggested:

- Advertising in shop windows
- Advertising on television
- Advertising on national and local radio
- Posters on lamp posts and telegraph poles in local communities.

A small number of participants in different focus groups also identified email/the Internet as a potential means of making contact. However, in doing so, one participant recognised that not all children and young people had access to these services ("Email ... if you had a PC") while another suggested that this reality rendered this route somewhat unsatisfactory: "Email is not great ... Not everybody has access to the Internet".

### **Individual or group invitations to children and young people?**

In response to the question of whether it mattered if they were invited to participate in a consultation on an individual basis or as part of a group:

- 55 participants said that it did matter
- 51 of these 55 participants said that they would prefer to be invited on an individual basis/receive individual invitations
- 4 of these 55 participants said that they would prefer to be invited as part of a group
- 6 participants said it did not matter one way or another
- 1 participant made no comment.

Thus, a very significant majority of the children and young people consulted for this study articulated a preference for being invited to participate in a consultative process/event on an individual basis and for receiving individual invitations. In stating as much, participants gave one or more of the following reasons:

- It makes you feel important and special
- It helps to ensure that you and your parents/guardians receive the necessary information
- It is nice to receive an individual invitation
- It is more exciting to receive an individual invitation
- It is nice to get something addressed to you in the post.

Several participants also suggested that for one or more of these reasons, sending out individual invitations to children and young people was more likely to generate enthusiasm among them to participate in a consultation.

### **About individual Invitations**

- "I like getting one to me"
- "Individual invitations because it's important to be asked, because it means you were picked because you are good, because it gives you information about what's going on"
- "Because it's special"
- "It's nice to get your own one"
- "Because there could be, like, something, like, on it ... and if you wanted to show it to your Ma or something"
- "... makes you want to go more"
- "I'd prefer one for myself"
- "Because you can keep reminding yourself" (of what the consultation is about, etc.)
- "Makes you feel important"
- "Makes you feel *you* have a voice"
- "If you sent one to six, how could you do that? Because one lives in [X]. One lives in [Y]. And we live in [Z]."
- "If you get anything [in the post], it's [only at] Christmas"



One participant who expressed a preference for group invitations felt that being invited as part of a group would be more likely to secure children's and young people's involvement: "... if it was sent to the class, it would be more likely that more people would go". Three participants in another focus group did not explain their preference for being invited as part of a group, but simply stated that "group is better". An additional participant in another focus group who articulated a preference for group invitations also suggested that the choice of individual or group invitations should depend on whether you are inviting children and young people to speak in an individual or a representative capacity.

Of the participants who had no preference, one argued that the main thing is to be invited: "Don't care, as long as you are invited".

Additional points made by a small number of individual participants in the context of responding to this question were:

- It is important that the language, style, layout and content of invitations are age-appropriate
- In cases where invitations are to be sent by post to children's and young people's homes, parents/guardians should receive prior notification to this effect
- Invitations should only be sent to children and young people once their parents/guardians have consented to their child receiving the invitation and/or to their child's involvement in a consultation.

## 7.4. Implications

Key implications and recommendations arising in relation to the issues raised in this chapter are presented below.

### **Direct and indirect consultation**

- In the interests of future good practice with regard to consulting children and young people at the level of public policy development, due consideration ought to be given to:
  - When and on what grounds it may be more appropriate to consult with children/young people directly or indirectly in relation to public policy development
  - When and on what grounds it may be more appropriate to consult only with relevant representative organisations or, alternatively, with children and young people through their representative organisations
  - Whether efforts can and ought to be made to ascertain that a decision by policy-makers and/or organisations not to consult with children and young people directly has been made in good faith
  - In cases of mediated consultation with children and young people, how to assist organisations with ensuring that they act both faithfully and strategically in their presentation of the voices/views of the children and young people they have consulted in relation to a given public policy issue
  - In light of current low levels of consultation with children and young people at the level of political decision-making, how to quantitatively and qualitatively increase the opportunities for the direct and mediated involvement of children and young people in decision-making relating to public policy development.

### **Legal and protection issues**

- A piece of research is needed on how best to respond to legal and protection issues arising in relation to consultation with children and young people at the level of public policy development. Among the issues this piece of research should address are: Garda clearance, mandatory reporting and insurance. Subject to their approval at macro-level, information and recommendations in the form practical 'checklists' or guidelines should be disseminated to all relevant organisations.

**Making contact with children and young people**

- In the interests of future good practice, the following actions should be taken in relation to the issue of making contact with children and young people:
  - Raise awareness among relevant policy-makers of the importance of using contact routes that are safe for *and* acceptable to children and young people
  - Raise awareness of the fact that adults can act as gatekeepers and develop and implement a preventive plan to combat this issue in the medium- to long-term
  - Identify when it will be appropriate to issue individual or, alternatively, group invitations to children and young people
  - Consider how invitations might best be delivered and what steps ought to be taken prior to doing so – for example, giving prior notification to and/or seeking prior consent from parents/guardians.

# Chapter Eight: Implementation Issues

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## Introduction

This chapter addresses five core issues pertaining to the implementation of consultations with children and young people:

- **What?** – About what, at what levels and at what stages are and might children and young people be consulted?
- **Where?** – Where should consultation with children and young people take place?
- **When?** – When and how often should consultation with children and young people occur?
- **Who?** – Who should facilitate consultation with children and young people?
- **How?** – How should questions be asked of children and young people and what methodologies should be used to enable them to respond?

These issues are addressed with reference to one or more elements of the research undertaken for this study. Implications and recommendations arising from the findings are presented at the end of the chapter.

## 8.1. WHAT?

There are three dimensions to this question:

- What issues/themes to consult children and young people on?
- What levels to consult children and young people at?
- What stages of a consultation to involve children and young people in?

Findings of the literature review, the survey and the interviews in relation to these questions are presented below. With the exception of a question relating to evaluation, children and young people who participated in the focus group consultations undertaken for this study were not asked any questions relating to these issues. Their views on children's and young people's participation in the evaluation stage of consultation are presented in the discussion of evaluation in Chapter 9 (section 9.2.4).

### 8.1.1. What? – What the Literature says

#### Themes/Issues

As examples provided in the first and subsequent chapters of this report illustrate, children and young people in and beyond Ireland are increasingly being afforded opportunities to be consulted on a diverse range of issues, including at the level of public policy. These include core issues affecting children and young people such as education, health, housing, youth employment, play and leisure, the protection of children's rights and human rights, bullying, corporal punishment and the environment.

## Issues that Children/Young People in Ireland have been, are being and will be heard on

### Education

- Issues relating to internal decision-making within schools and via student councils provided for under the Education Act, 1998
- The role of guidance within schools as a function of social inclusion<sup>130</sup>
- The development of a *Quality Framework Initiative for YOUTHREACH*<sup>131</sup>
- Supporting teenage student mothers in ongoing mainstream education<sup>132</sup>
- Issues being addressed by Local Committees created by the Department of Education and Science under the Home, School, Community Liaison Scheme
- Early school leaving, in the context of an National Economic and Social Forum's examination of this issue.

### Health

- *Creating Healthy Citizens*, a report of recommendations from the Transition Year Student Health Fora in the Eastern Region organised by the Health Promotion Department for the Area Health Boards<sup>133</sup>
- *The School Journal*, a project instigated by the North Western Health Board and involving the provision of information to young people on health services<sup>134</sup>
- The Western Health Board's *Health Advice Café* in Galway<sup>135</sup>
- The development of *Best Health for Adolescents*, the National Conjoint Health Committee's recommendations on the development of an adolescent friendly health service<sup>136</sup>
- The North Eastern Health Board's website on youth health issues, [www.youthhealthnet.ie](http://www.youthhealthnet.ie)

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### Play and Recreation

- Play provision in Ballymun, as part of Ballymun Regeneration Ltd's *Masterplan* for the physical, social and economic regeneration of Ballymun<sup>138</sup>
- It is anticipated that children and young people will be consulted in relation to the National Play and Recreation Policy that will be developed and implemented in accordance with commitments in this regard contained in the *National Children's Strategy*.

### Residential Care

- Daily life in residential care centres, plans for future care, centres' reviews of their care plans<sup>139</sup>
- Western Health Board's *Charter of Rights for Children and Young People in Care*.<sup>140</sup>

### Housing

- Youth homelessness, via the Forum on Youth Homelessness.<sup>141</sup>

### Violence, Abuse and Neglect

- Research commissioned by Women's Aid on young people's experience of and responses to violence and abuse<sup>142</sup>
- A recently published report by the North Eastern Health Board on developing systems for effective practice under *Children First* in relation to child neglect includes a recommendation that the child's voice should be at the forefront of any assessment.<sup>143</sup>

### Youth Work

- Consultation in relation to the *EU White Paper on Youth*
- The *Youth Work Act, 2001* stipulates that at least 20% of members of the local voluntary youth work committees provided for in the Act should be under 25 years of age.

<sup>130</sup> See Youthstart et al (n.d.).

<sup>131</sup> Unpublished document received from the National Co-ordinator for YOUTHREACH.

<sup>132</sup> McArdle, M., *Waterford Student Mothers Group Annual Report 2000* (Youghal: Community Consultants, 2000) and McArdle, M., *Waterford Student Mothers Group Evaluation Report*, July 2001 (Youghal: Community Consultants, 2001).

<sup>133</sup> See Health Promotion Department of the Area Health Boards (2000).

<sup>134</sup> See Denyer et al (2001), pp. 56-58.

<sup>135</sup> See Denyer et al (2001), p. 59. At the time when this case study was written, the Health Advice Café was still in the development stage. Called 'The Gaf', it is now up and running and the young people's committee that contributed to decision-making relating to its establishment will also have a key role to play in its future development.

As a number of these examples suggest, children and young people experiencing poverty and/or other forms of social exclusion have been/are being enabled to contribute to public policy initiatives aimed at combating specific aspects of poverty and social exclusion that affect them (see also Chapter One, section 1.4.3.). However, these targeted opportunities are few and far between and typically involve small numbers of children and young people. It can and ought to be expected that the implementation of Goal One of the *National Children's Strategy* will increase both the number and quality of opportunities for children and young people, including those experiencing poverty or other forms of social exclusion, to be consulted in relation to a wide range of public policy issues affecting them. What will be interesting to observe as initiatives such as the national Dáil na nÓg and local Comhairle na nÓg evolve over the lifetime of the Strategy is the extent to which children and young people themselves will be enabled to identify the issues they wish to speak to and see addressed by policy-makers at both national and local level.

### Levels

Information gathered during the literature review also suggests that children and young people in and beyond Ireland are being enabled to contribute at different levels of decision-making (see Chapter One). However, it continues to be the case that, in quantitative terms, children and young people are most likely to be involved at micro levels of decision-making such as organisations' internal decision-making relating to service provision. In Ireland, as elsewhere, there is evidence of their involvement at a macro level and in relation to decision-making on public policy issues and developments. However, involvement at this level remains in its infancy. Moreover, in cases where children and young people have been and/or are being afforded opportunities to be heard in relation to public policy developments at national and local level, information gathered by us on these opportunities precludes an accurate analysis of the extent to which these opportunities provide for children's and young people's *meaningful* involvement. For example, local youth councils or equivalents exist in many countries, but their existence does not in itself mean that children's and young people's views are filtering into and/or helping to fashion decision-making relating to the public policy issues that these children and young people are speaking to. In this regard, we would hazard a guess that Zimbabwe's national Children's Parliament is not the only such structure to have been created at either national or local level that has not been enabled to operate as a sufficiently representative and effective channel for children and young people to be heard in relation to public policy issues affecting them.<sup>144</sup>

### Stages

As regards the stages at which children and young people have been and are being involved in consultative processes/events relating to public policy development, it would appear to be the case that consultative work with children and young people in this regard is typically undertaken in a manner that adheres to a commonly held understanding of what 'consultation' means (see Chapter Three, section 3.1). In other words, it is not usual for children and young people to be involved in the formulation, design and planning stages of consultations, including those relating to public policy development. Hill records a similar

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<sup>136</sup> See Denyer et al.

<sup>137</sup> Reported in *The Irish Times*, 21 December 2001.

<sup>138</sup> DHR for Ballymun Regeneration Ltd, *Children's Play. Questionnaire Analysis: 'Where I Play'* (Dublin: Ballymun Regeneration Ltd, March 1998). For information on equivalent opportunities for children and young people in the UK to be consulted in relation to play/recreation, go to the Article 31 website [www.playtrn.demon.co.uk/a31.htm](http://www.playtrn.demon.co.uk/a31.htm).

<sup>139</sup> See Irish Social Services Inspectorate (2001), p.37.

<sup>140</sup> Western Health Board, *Charter of Rights for Children and Young People in Care* (Galway: WHB, 2000)

<sup>141</sup> See Northern Area Health Board (2000).

<sup>142</sup> Child and Women Abuse Studies Unit, University of North London for Women's Aid, *Teenage Tolerance: The Hidden Lives of Irish Young People* (Dublin: Women's Aid, 2001)

<sup>143</sup> Horwath, J., *Child Neglect: Is My View Your View?* (NEHB, 2002)

<sup>144</sup> As noted in Chapter One, young MPs to this Children's Parliament recently produced a critical evaluation of it as a mechanism for enabling the voices of children and young people in Zimbabwe to be heard. See Save the Children, Zimbabwe (2000).

finding with regard to children's and young people's involvement in research, suggesting that in this respect consultation with children/young people may be no different from consultation with adults:

"... children are rarely involved as active participants in research ... There are very few studies with adult 'subjects' I am aware of which incorporate them in the design, analysis or reporting. Examples with children are even fewer and they usually concern children on the threshold of adulthood – 16 and 17 year olds."<sup>145</sup>

Furthermore, of existing 'good practice guidelines' or equivalent documents consulted during the literature review, less than a handful make reference to the issue of involving children and young people in the preparatory stages of a consultation. Significantly, however, those that do, assert that children and young people *should* be involved in one or more aspects of the preparatory stages:

"Many of the most effective conferences are those that have engaged children from the outset so that they can be involved in defining the aims, the format, the content and planned outcomes"<sup>146</sup>

"Participation in the planning of projects makes it more likely that subsequent involvement of children and young people will be positive ... [W]here young people complain of bad experiences of involvement it often centres on 'not knowing what's going on' ... Involvement at the planning stage should avoid this and make it more likely that participating children and young people are given clear information on their role in the project and proper preparation and training as appropriate."<sup>147</sup>

"The earlier you involve children in actually planning the consultation, the more likely it is to be successful. They will have valuable insights into which questions to ask and how to ask them."<sup>148</sup>

As regards evaluation, it would appear that in the Irish context, children and young people are being afforded opportunities to participate in evaluations relating to their involvement in decision-making. O'Leary's recent mapping study for the Carnegie Young People Initiative reports that of the 60% of organisations surveyed which stated that they had evaluated the involvement of young people in the organisation's decision-making, 79.1% confirmed that young people were involved in the evaluation.<sup>149</sup>

### 8.1.2. What? – Survey findings

Recipients of the survey for this study were not asked to specify themes/issues they have consulted children and young people on. However, recipients were asked to indicate:

- The level(s) at which the organisation has consulted or currently consults with children/young people and the frequency with which it does so
- Whether the organisation has evaluated the involvement of children/young people in its decision-making/policy-making and whether children/young people have participated in the evaluation.

#### Levels

The findings on this question were presented in Chapter Seven (section 7.1.2.) in relation to the issue of direct/indirect consultation with children/young people. To summarise:

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<sup>145</sup> Hill (1998), p. 13.

<sup>146</sup> Lansdown (2001), p. 32. This text includes examples of conferences that have been organised with children and young people, names issues that warrant consideration with regard to involving children and young people in the preparatory stages, and suggests roles that children and young people might have in planning (p. 38 and pp. 46).

<sup>147</sup> Ward (1997), p. 10.

<sup>148</sup> Miller (1999), p. 56.

<sup>149</sup> O'Leary (2001), pp. 34-35.

- 41% of voluntary organisations and 21% of statutory organisations ‘most often’ consult with children and young people at ‘operational’ level. This is also the level at which both voluntary and statutory organisations ‘most often’ consult with children and young people.
- No voluntary organisations ‘most often’ consult with children and young people at the ‘managerial’, ‘political’ or ‘financial’ levels of decision-making.
- 17% of statutory organisations stated that they ‘most often’ consult children and young people in relation to decision-making at the ‘political level’.
- 17% of voluntary organisations and 35% of statutory organisations *never* consult with children and young people at the ‘managerial level’.
- 33% of voluntary organisations and 61% of statutory bodies stated that they *never* consult with children and young people at the ‘financial level’.
- 32% of voluntary organisations and 39% of statutory organisations stated that they *never* consult with children and young people at the ‘political level’ of decision-making.

In other words, the findings in relation to this question are consistent with O’Leary’s findings to the extent that they reveal that:

- Children and young people are most likely to be consulted in relation to internal, operational decision-making
- Children and young people are least likely to be consulted or consulted as a matter of course at higher levels of decision-making, including those levels at which organisations are likely to formulate their contributions to public policy development.

### Stages

The full findings in relation to the question of evaluation are presented in Chapter Nine (section 9.2.2.). However, the following key findings are worth noting here:

- 71% of responding organisations said that they had not yet evaluated the involvement of children/young people in their decision-making/policy-making. This finding is at odds with O’Leary’s findings in this regard (see section 8.1.1. above), but in keeping with the findings of the literature review, which suggest that evaluation of children’s and young people’s involvement in decision-making is not a given of existing consultation and/or not being recorded and published.
- More voluntary organisations are likely to engage in a process of evaluation than statutory organisations.
- Of the 29% of organisations (32 organisations) which indicated that they had evaluated children’s/young people’s involvement in their decision-making/policy-making, 33% (5 organisations) indicated that participating children/young people had been involved in the evaluations. While this figure is low, it is no lower than the percentage of staff members that have been involved (33%) and higher than the percentage of independent consultants that have been involved at the evaluation stage (27%).

These findings ought to be viewed with concern for the following reasons:

- They suggest that the status of evaluation as an integral part of any consultation process is not being recognised in a pro-active way. While this may be a side-effect of, for example, organisations having inadequate resources or time to undertake evaluations, the fact that existing opportunities for children and young people to be consulted at any level are not being or have not yet been evaluated means that potentially valuable lessons are being or may be lost that might contribute to the development of good practice.
- The finding that statutory organisations are less likely to engage in a process of evaluation than voluntary organisations suggests that an ‘evaluation culture’ has yet to become firmly embedded as part-and-parcel of the operation of governance and raises the question of whether the statutory sector will follow through on its responsibility to take a lead in promoting the importance of evaluation.
- While it might be welcomed that children and young people are no less likely to be involved in evaluations than staff members or independent consultants, the fact that they have not been involved in each of the evaluations that have taken place suggests that organisations may not

recognise or adequately appreciate the importance of children's and young people's assessments for the future development and enhancement of these opportunities.

### 8.1.3. What? – Interview findings

#### Themes/Issues

Interviewees were not asked to specify issues or areas of public policy about which they felt children and young people might or ought to be consulted. However, in responding to the questions asked of them, several interviewees named areas of public policy and service provision about which children and young people in the round or a particular group of children and young people might be consulted. These included:

- Health (children and young people generally)
- Education, including policy-making within schools (children and young people generally)
- Housing (children and young people generally)
- Play, recreation and the arts (children and young people generally)
- Anti-racism, multi-culturalism and inter-culturalism (children and young people generally)
- “Youth policies” (children and young people generally)
- Policy and service provision at local level (children and young people generally)
- Policies and services aimed at combating poverty at local and national level (children and young people experiencing poverty/socio-economic disadvantage)
- Policy and services aimed at combating youth homelessness (children and young people out of home)
- Policy and services focused on the Traveller community (young Travellers).

Interviewees also spoke in general terms about consulting children and young people in relation to areas of public policy that affect them:

- “There’s such a huge range of public policies in Ireland that I think they’d have a very good direct influence” – *Public policy-maker at national level*
- “At the local level ... I’d like there to be ... a local children’s forum ... that ties into everything that’s going on” – *Public policy-maker at national level*
- “Start consulting broader than children’s issues ... so that public policy-makers would begin to see issues as being relevant to children even though they’re not children’s issues” – *Representative of the voluntary youth sector*
- “I think that they could make a very meaningful contribution at all levels and across all of the different ranges of themes that we’d look at. I don’t think there’s anything that children couldn’t make some kind of comment on” – *Community and Enterprise Development Officer with a Local Authority*
- “In terms of social inclusion ... there are significant items or elements of the overall framework which impact enormously on children ... Not just the issue of consistent poverty which is important in itself, but also things like homelessness, drugs ... Those agendas affect young people.” – *Public policy-maker at national level*

#### Levels

As was illustrated in Chapter Four (section 4.3.) and Chapter Seven (section 7.1.3.), interviewees felt that children and young people could make a meaningful contribution at the level of public policy. In so doing, a number of interviewees suggested that this would be particularly the case with regard to public policy development at local level:



- “I think the most important ... consultation with children and young people is about what happens at local level. Because that’s where they live their lives ... I think their expectations of what they get from a local level consultation should be greater” – *Public policy-maker at national level*
- “Small and local and relevant [to start with]” – *Representative of the voluntary youth sector*
- “In relation to the policy piece, certainly at local level there has to be a spin-off ... at some point” – *Practitioner working with children and young people with physical disabilities*
- “It would really enrich the work that we do to be able to hear what children have to say and to hear what they want and how they want it. And I think that they could make a very meaningful contribution at all levels and across all of the different ranges of themes that we’d look at” – *Community and Enterprise Development Officer with a Local Authority*

However, in confirming that children and young people could make a meaningful contribution at the level of public policy, interviewees also underscored the existence of widespread scepticism among policy-makers at national and local level regarding children and young people’s capacity to do so. The presentation of children’s and young people’s voices should not be taken for granted and must be undertaken in a manner that is not only faithful to these voices, but that is also strategic so that these voices might actually be heard:

“It’s a delicate balance ... [I]f you do too much with it, the voice becomes filtered through a series of prisms and therefore becomes something else ... I think it’s legitimate to have that voice. I do think there are big challenges in structuring it and making it fruitful ... [T]here’s a clamour of voices waiting to be heard from across a wide spectrum of society and therefore people who want to be involved have to be ... quite ... clever about how they structure their message.” – *Public policy-maker at national level*

### Stages

Only one interviewee spoke directly about the stages of a consultation process at which children and young people might be involved. In doing so, he emphasised the importance of involving them at all stages of the process:

“They [young people] need to have a voice in that and they need to see where their decisions are going ... see that consultation would be that from the beginning they’re involved ... that it’s not just left at one meeting. ...[C]ertainly involve them at all stages if possible ... in particular the evaluation ... I think that ... it’s not just the final outcome, it’s the whole process of how it’s done.” – *Health Board practitioner*

Another interviewee spoke to this issue indirectly and with reference to Irish young people’s contribution to the consultation on the *EU White Paper on Youth*. In doing so, she focused on young people’s capacity to input in a meaningful way to the assessment of draft proposals/recommendations:

“... when we did the ... contribution to the European White Paper on Youth, they [the Youth Affairs section of the Department of Education and Science] held a consultation day when they brought about 150 young people together ... We were probably the only European country where they followed it up when the European Commission/Parliament issued their draft White Paper. The Department ... brought together thirteen of those young people for a day. I have to say, the quality of the feedback they [the young people] gave on it was superb, absolutely brilliant. And we had an excellent policy document out of it ... We were the only European country that came back with a very negative response ... It was negative not in the sense that they [the young people] were slagging it off, but they really had been through a

process and they were really able to read between the lines ... It was completely valid, it couldn't be challenged" – *Representative from the voluntary youth sector*

## 8.2. WHERE?

As regards where consultations with children and young people should be held, this section focuses on what young participants in the focus groups had to say. By way of introduction to their views, a number of general points ought to be made that arise from the literature review as well as from brief remarks on this issue made by policy-makers and practitioners interviewed for this study.

Consultations with children and young people are taking place in a diverse range of settings, which can be described in the following generic terms:

- Large and small settings
- Formal and informal settings
- Central and local settings (in geographical terms)
- Settings that are familiar and unfamiliar to participating children and young people
- Real and virtual (online) settings.

The key point to note in relation to these settings is that pros and cons are likely to attach to each and every one of them – for example:

- Investing proceedings as they can do with a sense of occasion, formal settings can help to reinforce children's and young people's sense that they and their views are being taken seriously. However, formal settings can also prove intimidating to children and young people and thereby curtail them from contributing in a manner that accurately reflects their capacities. This is especially likely in the case of particular groups of socially excluded children/young people – for example young people out of home.
- Online settings enable organisers to bypass the practical aspects of consultations in 'real' places (transport, venue, facilitators, refreshments, and so on), arrangements for which can be resource intensive in terms of costs and, above all, time. As p.c. access becomes more widespread, online settings have the potential to involve increasingly large numbers of children and young people in a consultative process. Moreover, these settings can be seen to afford children and young people time to respond. If sufficient care has also been taken in how they are set up, online settings can also afford children and young people privacy. However, in the present Irish context, online settings are likely to preclude the involvement of children and young people who do not have regular access to a p.c., where these children and young people are more likely to be those experiencing poverty/socio-economic disadvantage. There is also a huge challenge entailed in creating an online setting that is equitable and inclusive: existing examples of online consultation can be seen to be extremely limited in scope as regards accommodating a diversity of ages and capacities and to presume, for example, literacy levels that elude many children and young people.<sup>150</sup> Furthermore, online settings preclude those seeking the views of children and young people from knowing that the material they receive has actually been generated by children and young people.

In light of this, a second point to emphasise is the importance of selecting a setting that is supportive of children's and young people's involvement by being accessible and acceptable to them. The significance of setting/venue is underscored in the 'good practice' literature<sup>151</sup> and was briefly alluded to by a number of interviewees for this study. That children and young people also attach importance to this issue can be seen from the findings of the focus groups presented below. They suggest that children and young people are likely to have preferences in relation to venue/setting and a clear understanding of why particular venues are preferable.

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<sup>150</sup> See, for example, [www.olrni.gov.uk/youngpeople](http://www.olrni.gov.uk/youngpeople), [www.allchildrenni.com](http://www.allchildrenni.com) and [www.unicef.org/youth](http://www.unicef.org/youth).

<sup>151</sup> See, for example, Madden (2001), p. 9.

### 8.2.1. Where? – What Children and Young People say

Participants in the focus groups were asked five questions relating to the setting/venue of consultation:

- Does it matter whether or not someone who would like to know what you think about things meets you in person?
- Does it matter whether or not the place you are meeting is familiar to you?
- Where are good places for someone to meet with you or other young people to find out what you think about things?
- Is there is a best place? If there is a best place, where is it?
- Can you think of words to describe what a place that you would like to meet to say what you think about things looks and feels like?

The findings in relation to each of these questions are presented below.

#### Face-to-face consultation

Given that large scale consultations with children/young people frequently do not bring them face-to-face with policy-makers and the growing interest in consulting children/young people online, we decided to ascertain participants' views on the significance or otherwise of being consulted face-to-face. In response to this question:

- 52 participants articulated a preference, with all of them saying that they would prefer to be consulted face-to-face
- 2 participants said that it did not matter to them one way or another
- 8 participants made no comment.

Thus, an overwhelming majority of participants indicated a preference for being consulted in a setting that enabled them to meet face-to-face with the person/people seeking their views. Participants suggested that face-to-face settings:

- Promote children's/young people's trust in the consultation process and hence encourage them to speak more openly
- Satisfy curiosity children/young people can have about the people who are seeking to consult with them
- Help ensure that children/young people can satisfy any queries they might have about the consultation
- Enhance the quality of children's/young people's contributions
- Are more conducive to upholding privacy/"public confidentiality"
- Help children/young people to take the consultation seriously and are also a sign that those organising the consultation are taking it seriously
- Are likely to secure the involvement of more children/young people.

- "I wanted to know what you looked like"
- "To find out ... their personality" (i.e. personalities of those seeking children's/young people's views)
- "I want to know who they are"
- "Just in case you didn't get the letter" (i.e. letter with information about the consultation)
- "You couldn't write it through a letter or talk on the phone. You have to meet the person ... You're gonna have to meet them in private and, like, discuss it out."
- "It's more private"
- "It's ... better, like, to go and meet somebody because if you go on the internet or the phone everybody will hear you and look at your messages"
- "Because you know if they're nice or bad"
- "If I see you, I can trust you. I would be able to talk better"
- "You'd be wondering what this person is like and why was she not coming in and asking me the questions"
- "I wouldn't be here today if you hadn't been willing to meet me face-to-face"

### **Familiar or unfamiliar settings?**

In response to the question of whether or not it mattered if the setting/venue for the consultation would be familiar or unfamiliar to them:

- 28 participants said that it did matter
- 18 of these 28 participants said that they would prefer to be consulted in a familiar setting/venue
- 10 of these 28 participants said that they would prefer to be consulted in an unfamiliar setting
- 5 participants said 'it depends'
- 16 participants said that it didn't matter
- 13 participants made no comment.

Hence, the majority of participants articulated a preference and, of these, most stated that they would prefer to be consulted in a setting/venue that was familiar to them. Those who articulated this preference did so on the grounds that a familiar setting would be safer, more relaxing and/or less distracting. Those who stated that they would prefer to be consulted in an unfamiliar setting did so on the grounds that it would be more interesting, exciting and/or a good experience for them. The five participants who said 'it depends' offered the same reasons as those participants who had articulated a preference. Of the sixteen participants who said that the familiarity or otherwise of the setting did not matter, most argued that the presence of a familiar person is more important than the familiarity of the setting.

#### **Familiar setting/venue is better**

- "You wouldn't really be able to talk to anybody " (in an unfamiliar setting)
- "Because you know your way home and you've been there and you won't get lost"
- "So you know where you're going"

#### **Unfamiliar setting/venue is better**

- "interesting, more exciting"
- "I think it's better if you don't know the place ... because it's a new experience for you"
- "It's more interesting to go to new places"

#### **It does not matter**

- "It doesn't matter ... as long as you're with somebody you know"
- "It doesn't matter where you are, but you have to be with someone you know"
- "If you have something to say, you will say it anywhere"

### **Good places and best places**

Participants identified the following places as 'good places' to meet:

- Community-based services attended by children and young people
- School
- Home
- Formal/informal places
- Familiar/unfamiliar places
- Indoors/outdoors
- Public/private places
- 'Neutral' places, i.e. 'neutral territory'.

Of these, community-based services attended by children and young people and school were the settings most frequently cited as 'good places' to consult with children and young people.

#### **Good Places**

- "Youth club and in school"
- "Some place different than other meeting places"
- "In a park, if it's sunny"
- "Our youth club or somewhere in our area"
- "informal ... so you can relax"
- "formal ... is good if serious matters are being discussed ... if you have to pay attention"
- "at home"
- "at the park"
- "at home with your mom and dad"
- "the family centre"
- "school"
- "community centre"
- "leisure centres"
- "Somewhere you're used to and feel comfortable in"
- "Somewhere we know and all feel comfortable in"
- "A nice, quiet place"
- "In the place where we live ... indoors"
- "Somewhere comfortable"
- "Somewhere neutral – not school"
- "Community projects"
- "A neutral venue"
- "Somewhere familiar, but not a school setting"

As regards whether there was a 'best place' to consult with them:

- 41 participants said that there was
- 15 participants said that there was not
- 2 participants made no comment
- 1 participant said "maybe", but did not specify where.

Of the 'best places' named, those most often cited were community-based services attended by children and young people, whereby many participants identified the setting in which the focus group they were participating in for this study was taking place. School was also identified by a considerable number of participants as a 'best place'. Several participants, and notably younger participants, identified home as the 'best place'.

#### **Best Places**

- "In [local family centre] because I feel comfortable in this environment"
- "Somewhere near to your [my] home and somewhere you [I] know"
- "Youth club"
- "In my home because my parents [are there]"
- "School"
- "At home with your mam or dad"
- "my house"
- "at school"
- "Somewhere that young people would enjoy going"
- "At home on the site"
- "[X] would be the best place, because it's usually the place where all Travellers meet when they are discussing something. It's like a second home for Travellers"
- "In our site"
- "Somewhere you are familiar with, e.g. school, youth club"
- "Schools are a very good place to contact children for their views"
- "School or clubs or sports club"

### **What a good place looks like and feels like**

In being asked to find words to describe what a place they would like to meet for the purposes of a consultation would look and feel like, participants responded with a wide range of terms. However, upon analysis of the findings it was interesting to find the same generic terms being used again and again. Taken together, they can be seen to conjure an environment that is welcoming, informal, comfortable and enabling for children and young people:

#### **Good places look and feel ...**

- “comfortable”
- “friendly”
- “warm”
- “cosy”
- “colourful”
- “safe”
- “caring”
- “peaceful”
- “clean”
- “bright”
- “inviting”
- “fun”

### **8.3. WHEN?**

The research undertaken for this study suggests there are two issues that merit consideration:

- How often children/young people should be consulted
- When consultation with children/young people should occur.

These two issues are discussed below with reference to findings arising from the survey of and interviews with policy-makers and practitioners as well as the focus groups conducted with children and young people. Apart from suggesting that consultation with children and young people in relation to public policy development at national and local level is gradually becoming more frequent, the literature reviewed for this study had nothing substantial to say on this issue.

#### **8.3.1. When? – Survey findings**

Survey recipients were asked to indicate the frequency with which children and young people are consulted by the organisation and the frequency with which children and young people are consulted at different levels of decision-making within the organisation. The findings in relation to this latter question are presented in section 8.1.2 above. As regards the frequency with which responding organisations consult with children and young people, the findings presented in Table 3 below indicate that the majority of organisations consult with children/young people in relation to organisational decision-making ‘routinely, as required’ or ‘as part of their everyday work’. This finding suggests that:

- Organisations are recognising children/young people as stakeholders
- Organisations are consulting children/young people in relation to aspects of decision-making relevant to them
- Organisations have the capacity to create the conditions necessary for children’s/young people’s involvement in decision-making processes relating to the organisation.

**Table 3**

How often does the organisation consult with children/young people in relation to decision-making?

	No.	%
It is part of our everyday work	16	40
At least once every two months	3	8
Routinely, as required	17	42
In the past, but not currently	4	10
Only once, not to be repeated	0	0
Total	40	100

### 8.3.2. When? – Interview findings

As the interview findings presented in Chapter Five illustrated (section 5.3.), practitioners and policy-makers consistently identified time as a key resource issue in relation to consultation with children/young people. They stressed that this issue would need to be addressed in a manner that took account of the acute time-constraints faced by policy-makers and practitioners alike:

“All policy-makers are extremely busy people. It’s a very, very busy environment in which we operate.” – *Public policy-maker at national level*

“It needs to be dedicated people to do it because the people on the ground are operating the services ... [D]ay-to-day stuff just takes over and it will get put on the back burner” – *Practitioners working with young people out of home*

The majority of interviewees did not speak at all to the issues of when and how often consultation with children and young people ought to take place. Moreover, their comments on the time issue saw it being addressed exclusively from the perspective of adult professionals. Only three interviewees spoke to the issues of when and/or how often consultations with children and young people should occur. Their comments were brief, but in making them, each of these interviewees injected a child-centred dimension into their comments on the time issue. The first recognised that current scheduling for the local authority’s consultations with adult members of the community might not be appropriate for consultation with children/young people:

“With adults we would tend to do evening consultations where that might not be the most appropriate ... with children” – *Community and Enterprise Development Officer with a Local Authority*

The second interviewee, a practitioner working with young people out of home, emphasised the need to approach the timing of consultation with this group with sufficient flexibility to take account of the unpredictability and at times chaotic nature of these young people’s daily lives:

“You couldn’t just set a time and an agenda ... With this group of young people it won’t work like that. And it shouldn’t be expected to ... [I]t definitely won’t go according to plan” – *Practitioner working with young people out of home*

The third interviewee, a public policy-maker at national level, suggested the need for a strategic approach to timing the frequency of consultation with children and young people. In doing so, this interviewee implicitly acknowledged that the consultation fatigue that children and young people develop can be a side-effect of being over-consulted and/or involved in unrelated, one-off consultative events:

“Adults get their consultation fatigue ... and I’m sure young people ... So you need to think carefully about why you want to consult and that it’s appropriate at this point in time to consult” – *Public policy-maker at national level*

### 8.3.3. When? – What Children and Young People say

Participants in the focus groups were asked one question relating to the timing of consultation with them: When is a good time for someone to meet with you to do something like this? In their responses lies the rub. As is illustrated by the examples below, participants' replies were characterised by their specificity. This defining feature indicates that, like policy-makers and practitioners, children and young people:

- Lead busy daily lives
- Would like this to be recognised
- Have their own priorities and would like consultation with them to be timed in a manner that acknowledges this.

The findings of this question suggest that if the development of future good practice is to entail a child-centred perspective, public policy-makers and practitioners will need to approach the timing of consultations in a manner that takes account of children's and young people's understanding of their daily lives. As one young person put it, consultation should take place "at a time which suits both parties", i.e. the adults consulting and the children/young people being consulted.

#### When to consult Children and Young People

- "When you are not busy, ready to discuss the certain topics that would be on the agenda to talk about"
- "Monday, because we do lots of things on the rest of the days"
- "In the evening, Monday or Wednesday"
- "At the weekend when you are not in school and when you're not doing something very important"
- "when you're in the family centre because you have your friends and you can talk"
- "after school because you don't want to waste your weekend"
- "weekends and public holidays because we would have more free time, time to prepare for it"
- "not at the weekend as we may have things to do and are most likely to be free after school"
- "After 6.00pm"
- "When I have lots of free time, when I'm in the mood and when I have nothing to do and am bored"
- "After school – 6.00/6.30pm"
- "After school is fine. But not on Monday"
- "In the evening after school. Say about six"
- "During school hours if the meeting isn't too long"
- "Maybe a weekend, as it won't be interrupting school studies"
- "During the school year because you are more active in decision-making, children's rights, etc."
- "School hours because after-school commitments are hard to break"
- "School time. After that most people have a lot of things to do and plans and will not be able to concentrate"
- "Friday afternoon after school – no homework"

### 8.4. WHO?

As our discussion of resource issues in Chapter Five showed, the question of who might be in a position to facilitate consultation with children/young people and the need for adults to receive training to perform this role are issues about which relevant practitioners and policy-makers are keenly aware:



- All of the individuals interviewed for this study made reference to the important role that facilitators will play in helping to ensure the success of future consultative processes/events with children and young people
- Several survey respondents identified the provision of training to individuals to undertake this role as a key next step to progressing consultation with children and young people
- Goal One of the *National Children's Strategy* includes a commitment to develop "professional training courses ... for key staff to equip them to operate and support children's participation"<sup>152</sup>
- The National Children's Office is supporting the ISPCC's newly established Children's Consultation Unit to provide this training.

This conception of the importance of facilitation is supported by the literature reviewed for this study and underscored, for example, by the increasing number of training manuals and facilitation guides that are being produced to enable individuals to act as facilitators.<sup>153</sup>

However, while the need to provide training in facilitation is recognised, the literature reviewed provides no conclusive recommendations in relation to the question of who might make for a 'good facilitator' in the first place. We met with the contrasting, but equally compelling viewpoints that it will be preferable if the facilitator is known to or, alternatively, not known to the children/young people s/he is facilitating. As the findings from the interviews and focus groups below suggest, policy-makers, practitioners and children/young people are divided in their views on this matter. We would suggest, therefore, where possible, children and young people themselves might be involved in deciding who facilitates a consultation with them.

#### **8.4.1 Who facilitates? – Interview findings**

Seven interviewees addressed the issue of who might make for a good facilitator. Five were practitioners working directly with children/young people and two were public policy-makers at national level. Not surprisingly, the five practitioners had most to say on this matter. Due to their professional roles, three of these practitioners spoke on this issue with reference to the particular group of children/young people with whom they work - young Travellers, children and young people out of home, and children and young people with physical disabilities. As the excerpts below illustrate:

- Several interviewees argued that a 'good facilitator' would be someone with a certain level of knowledge and understanding of how children and young people think, understand and interpret the world around them.
- One interviewee stressed the importance of emotional skills for facilitating consultation with children and young people. This view was endorsed by other interviewees through their explicit or implicit references to the importance of facilitators being able to exercise sensitivity.
- Most interviewees underscored the importance of facilitators knowing something about the children and young people they facilitate. In terms of specific groups, this would entail having an understanding of children's and young people's experiences, capacities and/or modes of communicating. However, in making this point, interviewees did not suggest that facilitators *must* be people who work with the children/young people on a daily basis. Indeed, a number of interviewees suggested that it might be preferable for facilitators to be 'outsiders'. One interviewee was equivocal about whether or not independent facilitators would be preferable, recognising that children/young people might be encouraged or, alternatively, discouraged from speaking to someone they did not know.
- The two interviewees working respectively with young people out of home and children/young people with physical disabilities both suggested that if the route of 'outside'

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<sup>152</sup> Government of Ireland (2000), p. 36.

<sup>153</sup> See, for example, Treseder (1997), Griffiths et al (n.d.), Madden (2001), the Northern Ireland Human Rights Unit's *Facilitator's Guide* (n.d.) as well as the Children's Law Centre's and Save the Children's *Guidelines* for consulting with vulnerable young people (n.d.).

facilitators was to be taken, facilitators would need to be assisted by people who knew the children/young people.

- One interviewee suggested that children and young people should be facilitated by individuals whom they could clearly identify as having this specific role.

#### **Facilitating children/young people in the round**

- “Ideally someone from outside ... to get an objective look ... To facilitate a group of young people is a specific skill” – *Health Board practitioner*
- “... you need people with that knowledge and understanding of how children understand material” – *Public policy-maker at national level*
- “I think the advice is ... know your group, know a little about them” – *Children's consultation officer*
- “.... Capacity and skills issues. Not just intellectual, but emotional which are required [to ensure that consultation] ... is not a technocratic process in any sense. There is a big challenge ... to everyone involved in the emotional side of behaviour.” – *Public policy-maker at national level*

#### **Facilitating children/young people out of home**

- “We’d feel that it does need to be somebody who’s a bit more objective ... It would have to be somebody they saw very clearly in that role, I think. ... Maybe a combination of somebody they know and somebody from outside trying to facilitate. ... I think ... somebody who is separate in terms of years ... early twenties, but ... would have been through those services ... Also, for them to see somebody who is in that position ... gives them hope or optimism that just because you went through homeless services doesn’t mean you’re always going to be socially excluded, that there are ways out of it. But I suppose what happens is, when people get out of it, a lot of people want to stay away from it and they don’t want to be connected back to the service. But I think somebody [like that] ... skilled or trained up to do that work would be very effective ... And I think young people [out of home] could identify with somebody like that ... It might be easier for them to talk to somebody who’s been in that situation” – *Practitioner working with young people out of home*

#### **Facilitating young Travellers**

- “You need to be clear around what you’re hearing ... Their [young Travellers] way of talking can be quite different ... because ... the underlying values of a Traveller culture are quite different ... Ideally it would be someone who has ... [an] understanding and can interpret things [correctly] ... A Traveller adult ... doing it would be the ... ideal situation because ... they can interpret what young Travellers are truly expressing” – *Pavee Point representative*

#### **Facilitating children and young people with physical disabilities**

- “I can see dilemmas around ... say, you [the researcher] coming into the consultation process ... [T]here’s ... all the normal piece around them saying ‘Who is she anyway? I don’t know if I can be honest with her ...’ Normal adolescent stuff. So, you’ve got to work your way through that barrier first of all. Now, on the other hand, they may decide ‘Well, I will talk to her and I’m not talking to the person I know’ ... But I think ... if it’s decided to go the road of the independent facilitator ... you may still need interpreters who know the children well, who would be with them and can interpret the body language for you ... So, I think, yes, you could have the independent person coming in, but you would need to look at that ... I’m just thinking, in terms of children, probably ... I’d ... [say]: ‘No, we don’t have to go down the road of having independent facilitators ... [getting disability awareness] training’. Maybe it ought to be those within the organisation who ... do it.” – *Practitioner working with children and young people with physical disabilities*

#### 8.4.2. Who facilitates? – What Children and Young People say

Participants in the focus groups were invited to respond to three questions relating to facilitation:

- Does it matter whether or not you know the person who is asking you for your views and ideas?
- Are you glad that someone you know and trust is here today to give us a hand?
- Who is the kind of person you are happy to share your views and ideas with?

Their responses are presented below.

##### **A familiar or an unfamiliar facilitator?**

In response to the question of whether or not it mattered if they knew the person facilitating a consultation with them:

- 20 participants said it did matter
- Of these 20 participants, 12 said they would prefer the facilitator to be someone they knew
- Of these 20 participants, 8 said they would prefer the facilitator to be someone they didn't know
- 22 participants said it did not matter
- 5 participants equivocated
- 2 participants made no comment
- No precise numbers are available for participants in one focus group (12 young people), but several of them made comments.

In light of the literature review and the interviews, it is interesting to find that approximately one third of the children and young people said that it would not matter to them whether or not they knew the facilitator. Equally interesting is the narrow margin between the number of participants who stated a preference for being facilitated by someone they know (12) and those who said they would prefer to be facilitated by someone they do not know (8).

Those who stated a preference for being facilitated by someone they know did so on the following grounds:

- It feels more comfortable to talk to someone you already know
- Safety/protection – It is safer if the facilitator is someone you know
- It is easier to know whether you can trust the facilitator to treat what you have to say in confidence (in the sense of “public confidentiality”) if s/he is someone you know
- There is no point talking to someone you do not know.

Those who stated a preference for being facilitated by someone they do not know gave the following reasons:

- It is nice to meet new people
- It is easier to talk to / you can be more open
- It is easier to ensure confidentiality
- It is easier to listen and pay attention.

As such, it can be seen that participants had conflicting views on whether a familiar or unfamiliar facilitator would be best placed to a) protect confidentiality and b) enable children and young people to speak openly.

##### **It is better if the facilitator is someone you know**

- “It’s nice to get to know someone new for a change”
- “Know I’ll be safe and protected”
- “No point in telling someone you don’t know”
- “... because the person [you do not know] is probably gonna just tell everybody your point

- of view and just make fun of you, you know”
- “Because there’s no point telling somebody that you do not know”

**It is better if the facilitator is someone you do not know**

- “All the better if you don’t know them ... because then you know that people round the area won’t know what you’re talking about”
- “... sometimes you talk better to people you don’t know ... It’s easier to talk to someone you don’t know about some things”
- “... you would talk better”

Several participants who responded by saying that it did not matter explained their view. The reasons they gave were:

- Even if you do not know the facilitator, it is possible to discern from an early point in the consultation whether it is someone you can trust
- You will get to know the facilitator during the consultation
- It does not matter as long as there are other people (adults) present that you do know
- It does not matter as long as you know what the facilitator is doing and s/he explains everything clearly
- It does not matter as long as the person is friendly, understanding and/or not an authority figure
- It does not matter as long as the person is able to understand what you are saying and is capable of recording and representing your views.

**It does not matter**

- “... you’d get to know them better [during the consultation] and then you’d build up the trust ... [A]nd then you’d be able to talk even more serious about stuff”
- “You will [get to] know then ... when you’re doing it [the consultation]”
- “Even any stranger, but they should be very nice. They should be very understanding ... You have to be understanding”
- “It should be settled people because they understand more. Like you. Or even [project worker] ... Because they’d understand more. They know more. They’d be able to get them ideas down and they know how to talk about it.”

A small number of participants in the focus groups said that while they would not mind being facilitated by someone they do not know, they would welcome an opportunity to meet with the person prior to the consultation.

**Having someone you know to assist with the consultation**

When asked whether they were glad to have assistants present whom they knew at the focus groups for this study:

- 39 participants said ‘Yes’
- 5 participants said ‘No’
- 10 participants said ‘It does not matter’
- 6 participants made no comment.

Thus, a majority of participants were glad to have an adult they knew present to assist. In explaining their reasons, participants identified the presence of people they knew to assist as sources of trust, safety and/or help. One participant said that she would feel less shy having someone she knew present. The minority of participants who said they would prefer not have someone they knew present to assist did not explain their reasons. Likewise, the majority of those who said it did not matter did not elaborate. Of those who did, one participant maintained that trust would need to be built up between children/young people and the facilitator regardless while another simply said that she would “be myself” either way.

**Yes**

- “[It’s] kinda like a trust warranty”
- “It’s good to have someone that you know to be there because you don’t know ... what they [the facilitator] are going to do”
- “... because they help you”
- “Yeah, safer if I know someone”
- “... because you feel safer”
- “... you can trust them [that] they bring it up in work. Otherwise you wouldn’t be bothered” (i.e. more confident that the consultation is being undertaken in good faith if someone is present whom you know)
- “Know me and you understand me”

**It does not matter**

- “You have to build up that trust. You have got to get to know them to build up the trust”

**The ‘kind of person’ who is a good facilitator**

Participants were invited to think of words to describe the kind of person they would be happy to share their views and ideas with. The terms/phrases below represent the characteristics that participants prioritised. They collectively came up with a wide range of character/behaviour traits to define a person that they would be willing to be facilitated by. Taken together, these terms can be seen to identify a person who is:

- Respectful
- A good listener
- Friendly
- Informal
- Trustworthy
- Playful
- Non-judgemental
- Competent in their role
- Older than the children and young people s/he is consulting.

**The kind of person I am happy to share my views and ideas with is someone who (is/has)...**

- “trustworthy”
- “a good listener”
- “someone who cares”
- “kind person”
- “with a sense of humour”
- “will listen and understand”
- “funny”
- “a sense of humour”
- “pleasant”
- “joyful”
- “I could talk to in confidence. And that I could have a laugh with at the same time and that is comforting and that is warm hearted”
- “who doesn’t lie”
- “is older”
- “A young person. A woman. Someone who gets to the business but at the same time has fun”
- “funky”
- “a smiley face is good”
- “young, but older than me”
- “helpful”
- “intelligent”
- “truthful”

- “smart”
- “ would sit down and you’d be relaxed with and they’d listen to you and appreciate ... what you have to say ... and you’d feel comfortable talking to ... Someone who respects you and what you’re saying. And what you talk about ... It’s all about respect”
- “listens to you”
- “appreciates what you have to say”
- “respects you and what you’re saying”
- “... would listen and think about your ideas”
- “nice ... with a smile”
- “older”
- “caring ... and will keep you safe”
- “happy and safe person”
- “safe and kind”
- “open-minded”
- “down to earth”
- “easy to get along with”
- “funny and comfortable to sit with”
- “agrees or disagrees, but doesn’t make you feel stupid for your views or points you make”
- “middle-aged” (for the child in question, this meant a person of approximately 30 years of age)
- “understanding”
- “will get the ideas down and know how to talk about it”
- “People ... that understand it and can do things about it ... Like, not just talking about it and then they just go to someone else and your ideas get forgot about. Because that always happens ... Not just asking questions and just forgetting about it and doing nothing about it”
- “welcoming, young and who notes my points of view”
- “not too formal
- “looks interested”
- “friendly and who will respect and listen to your opinions without judging you”
- “sound and easy to talk to ... not too old ‘cause younger people would know more about what we mean and understand”
- “fresh-idead”
- “a good listener – not judgemental”

## 8.5. HOW?

Two key issues arise in relation to the question of how to consult with children and young people:

- Methods of asking questions
- Methodologies for eliciting responses.

Both issues are addressed below with reference to the literature review as well as findings arising from the survey, interviews and focus groups.

### 8.5.1. How? – What the Literature says

#### Methods of asking questions

The way in which children and young people are invited to contribute their views and ideas to a particular issue plays a key role in determining the content of their contributions. In deciding what approach to take, organisers will need to consider what the aims of the consultation are – for example:

- If the aim is to find out what is important to children and young people from their perspectives, then it may be appropriate to adopt a quasi-blank page approach that entails

asking broad, open questions that enable participating children and young people to identify issues and themes of relevance to them. This was the approach taken for the consultation with children and young people in relation to the *National Children's Strategy*. Prospective contributors were invited to respond to the following very general questions: "Is Ireland a good place for you to grow up in? What's good about it? What would make it better?"<sup>154</sup>

- If the aim is to find out children's and young people's observations and perspectives in relation to a particular theme or set of themes, then it will be necessary to identify these themes in terms that the children and young people concerned understand. This approach was taken, for example, by Save the Children, Scotland for the *Our Lives Consultation*. Participants were invited to discuss one of five themes: education, family life, health, protection from harm, and participation. While targeted and targeting, this approach provides participants with plenty of scope for appropriating these themes and interpreting them in their own terms.<sup>155</sup>
- If the aim is to elicit children's and young people's views and ideas in relation to particular aspects of a given issue, then it is likely to be more productive to ask them very specific open and/or closed questions.

It will be desirable in the case of the second and third of these approaches to afford participating children/young people an opportunity to identify any additional issues or aspects of a given theme that *they* consider important. Doing so enhances the scope for getting a child-centred perspective on the theme(s) in question. This was done, for example, by Save the Children, Scotland for the *Our Lives Consultation*.

It is the case that the more specific the approach, the greater the risk of leading children and young people towards particular responses. However, this risk can be curtailed by:

- Asking non-directive questions
- Ensuring that participants do not feel compelled to answer 'yes' or 'no' to a given question.

In addition, children/young people should be encouraged to explain the reasons for their answers. As well as enhancing an understanding of their answers, doing so provides for the collection of qualitative information.

### **Methodologies for eliciting responses**

The literature review revealed that a wide range of methodologies have been used to consult children and young people, including in relation to public policy development. These include:

- Discussion fora of different sizes, within which participants may debate, engage in public speaking and make public addresses
- Self-completion questionnaires/surveys
- One-to-one interviews
- Drama
- Art (painting, drawing, etc.)
- Craft
- Photography
- Video-making
- Written submissions (letters, emails, etc.)
- Story-writing and/or telling
- Poetry
- Games.

In selecting methodologies a variety of factors will need to be taken into consideration, including:

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<sup>154</sup> National Children's Strategy (2000), p. 10.

<sup>155</sup> Ritchie (2000), p. 11.

- Time available for the consultation, including the time available for the children/young people concerned
- Costs associated with a given method and funds available
- The space in which the consultation is to take place
- The number of children/young people to be consulted
- The capacity of a facilitator to facilitate consultation using a given methodology
- The kind of information being sought – for example, voting exercises and questionnaires comprising closed questions are more conducive to the collection of hard data;
- The theme of the consultation – If themes are of a controversial or personal nature, some children/young people may be more forthcoming if they can make their contributions using methodologies that allow them to respond privately, i.e. without having to share their observations with other participants
- How children and young people enjoy expressing themselves
- The needs and capacities of a particular child/young person or group of children/young people.

It will be in the interests of good practice and successful outcomes to prioritise the needs/capacities of the children/young people when selecting a methodology or methodologies:

- Children and young people have a right to *freedom* of expression, hence an entitlement to be enabled to express their views *freely*
- Selecting methodologies that accommodate the needs and capacities of a particular child/young person or group of children/young people will enhance the quality of their contributions.

We would recommend, therefore, that those working directly with a particular group of children/young people should be consulted in relation to the selection of methodologies. Furthermore, we would suggest that, where possible, children and young people with the capacity to do so might also be involved in selecting the methodologies or, alternatively, choosing from a range of options provided to them.

A second point to emphasise is that selecting an appropriate methodology is not simply a matter of sorting the wheat from the chaff: pros and cons are likely to attach to all methods. This is illustrated by the excerpt that follows, which is taken from recently published guidelines for Scottish Parliamentary Committees on improving consultation with children/young people in relation to public policy-making and legislation in Scotland.<sup>156</sup> In presenting this excerpt, we are not necessarily endorsing the evaluations being made within it.

METHOD	Advantages	Disadvantages
Small group discussions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gives some young people confidence</li> <li>• Allows for exchange of thoughts</li> <li>• Often fun to do</li> <li>• Quick</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unfair representation</li> <li>• Resentment of those who do not take part</li> <li>• Not good for shy children</li> <li>• Possible bias by researcher</li> </ul>
Consultative events	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unusually enjoyable</li> <li>• Engage considerable numbers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unfair representation</li> <li>• Resentment of those who do not take part</li> <li>• Not good for shy children</li> <li>• Insufficient time for everyone</li> <li>• Access can be difficult</li> </ul>
Meeting with MSPs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Direct: no intermediary</li> <li>• Opportunities for dialogue and clarification</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reluctance to express critical opinions</li> <li>• Unfair representation</li> <li>• MSPs may be too busy</li> </ul>

<sup>156</sup> Borland et al (2001), inset.



Self-completion questionnaire	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Very inclusive</li> <li>• Fair</li> <li>• Good for shy children</li> <li>• Responses can be more accurate</li> <li>• Confidential</li> <li>• Convenient</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Boring for some young people</li> <li>• Questions may be misunderstood</li> <li>• Some answers are joking or inaccurate</li> <li>• Limited topic coverage</li> </ul>
On-line consultation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Taps children's enthusiasm and expertise</li> <li>• Potentially very inclusive</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Many children do not have easy access to the internet</li> <li>• Privacy can be a problem</li> <li>• Opportunities for cheating</li> </ul>
Youth forums	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Involves more people than a single group</li> <li>• Participants gain confidence and satisfaction</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Limited representation</li> <li>• Resentment of those who do not take part</li> <li>• Access can be difficult</li> <li>• Hard to sustain interest</li> <li>• Requires resources to set up and sustain</li> </ul>

In light of the fact that each methodology will have its advantages and disadvantages, those responsible for these guidelines<sup>157</sup> and others have suggested that good practice and outcomes will be enhanced by using a combination of methods rather one methodology.

A combination of methods is also desirable because:

- Certain methods can work particularly well at different stages in a consultation.
- One method can serve to complement or supplement information generated through another. Art (painting, drawing) or photography, for example, can be very effective means of focusing children's and young people's minds on an issue or theme at the outset of a consultation and of enabling them to bring their own thoughts to it in an undirected way. However, to ensure that their intentions have been understood correctly, it will be desirable to follow-up such activities by asking children/young people questions about their paintings, drawings or photographs.

### 8.5.2. How? – Survey findings

Recipients of the survey were requested to indicate settings and methods/ activities they have used to consult with children and young people. In addition, they were asked to say whether or not these settings and methods/activities had proven to be effective. The findings in relation to this question are presented in Table 4 below. As the data presented in Table 4 indicates:

- All responding organisations to have used children's/youth fora and activity-based workshops identified these as effective settings to consult with children/young people.
- A majority of those to have used online settings found these effective (63%). This might be welcomed by policy-makers, in particular those who may be seeking to engage in large-scale, national consultations with children and young people in the future. However, the fact that a significant minority of responding organisations (37%) found online settings ineffective raises the question of whether this mechanism can work on a stand alone basis and, furthermore, whether and, if so, how it might be developed to be sufficiently inclusive and equitable.
- A significant majority of responding organisations (84%) identified committee meetings as effective. This finding might also be welcomed by policy-makers and others who are considering this mode of involving children/young people in public policy development. However, it needs to be borne in mind that this setting needs to be *rendered* effective, i.e. adapted to accommodate those children/young people who have the capacity to contribute within it.

<sup>157</sup> Borland et al (2001), p. 3.

- In terms of methods/activities, the findings suggest that the more 'hands-on' the approach is, the more effective it will be. Accordingly, that some organisations registered dissatisfaction with 'surveys' and 'email' may be due to the fact that these methods/activities tend to place those consulting and those being consulted at a greater distance.

**Table 4**

Settings/methods/activities used by organisations to consult with children/young people and their effectiveness

	Effective (%)	Ineffective (%)
<b>Settings</b>		
Online (n=8)	63	37
Children's youth fora (n=27)	100	0
Committee meetings (n=22)	86	14
Activity-based workshops (n=30)	100	0
<b>Methods/Activities</b>		
Focus Groups (n=33)	100	0
Survey (n=19)	84	16
Individual Interviews (n=19)	95	5
Writing (n=18)	100	0
Visual Arts (n=21)	95	5
Drama/Simulations (n=16)	100	0
Music (n=5)	100	0
Games (n=20)	100	0
Email (n=7)	71	29

Additional information provided by respondents in relation to this question suggests that settings/methods currently being used tend to be quite formal and adult-centred. As such, they underscore the need to promote a child-centred approach that focuses on and adequately accommodates the needs and capacities of a given group of children/young people:

#### 8.4. How? – Interview findings

Each of the policy-makers and practitioners interviewed for this study identified methodology as a cornerstone of good and successful practice for consulting with children and young people. As one public policy-maker at national level put it:

“... mechanisms ... would have a major part to play in terms of how successful the consultation is ... [T]here’s a big onus on the person going to consult to ... provide mechanisms and playing fields on which people can make that contribution.” – *Public policy-maker at national level*

#### Asking questions

Five interviewees recognised and/or posited the need to present themes and word questions in age-appropriate terms while one interview stressed the importance of taking a non-directive approach to questioning so that children/young people are enabled to say what *they* want to say:

- “Consultation with adults is probably more straightforward in the way you ask questions, and so forth. With young people, you have to bring it to their level, make it real” – *Health Board practitioner*
- “It’s more how it’s done, ... being simple and talking in their language” – *Pavee Point representative*
- “If a child of six is [asked] a question in an appropriate way, they will understand. The same as a child of fifteen or sixteen will say ‘Why are you speaking to me as if I’m six years old?’

We have to make sure that the questions we put to them are put to them in a way they understand" – *Children's consultation officer*

- "It's about breaking down those issues. Like when we say housing is a public policy issue. Or health care, hospitals. And you're not going to ask young people to do a submission on how they think ... hospitals can better cater for the needs of the population or whatever. But you can say 'When you're in a waiting room in a hospital, what would you like to see around it? What annoys you about it? What makes you cross about it?' And you can say about housing to a Traveller child or to somebody in council housing or whatever 'What do you need?' ... They can make a meaningful contribution if we ask them questions in a meaningful way" – *Representative of the voluntary youth sector*
- "Another issue is around how you elicit children's opinions without directing them ... That struck me as being one of the major problems ... They'll respond to what you ask them, but is that what they wanted to say?" – *Public policy-maker at national level*

### Eliciting responses

Four interviewees recognised the likelihood of needing to use methodologies that are different to those used to consult with adults. Three interviewees (all practitioners) went on to stress the importance of selecting age-appropriate methodologies and of ensuring that methodologies accommodated the needs and capacities of a particular group of children young people. As can be seen from the quotations presented below:

- A practitioner working with young people out of home argued that young people out of home would be curtailed in their ability to contribute if invited to do so through quasi-formal mechanisms such as children's and young people's fora.
- A practitioner working with children and young people with physical disabilities posited the need for a broad and flexible approach to selecting methodologies. With regard to children and young people with physical disabilities, this interviewee also recommended that it would be important to reflect on the feasibility and desirability of consulting "verbal" children and young people with children and young people whose mode of communication is "non-verbal". For example, the aids used to enable non-verbal children/young people to communicate can mean that it takes longer to elicit responses from these children/young people and this can/might prove frustrating for verbal children/young people. This interviewee also suggested that games can work very well with younger children while young people might prefer more traditional methods, like group discussion.
- Similarly, a third interviewee suggested that, in the case of group consultations, it is better to consult children/young people of similar ages. On foot of her considerable experience in this area, this interviewee identified methodologies that can work particularly well for children/young people of different ages.

### Methodologies: Possible Dos and Don'ts

#### Children and young people out of home

- "Some young people did write and contribute to it [the *National Children's Strategy*], but in terms of them going to the different fora that were set up ... that proved quite difficult ... How do you facilitate that small group with the larger group?... Most young people don't experience the difficulties that young people out of home experience ... It's finding ways to be able to listen to what they have to say. That, to me, would be the key to it ... In my experience of the group that we would work with [young people out of home], formal groups would be quite difficult ... They find that structure quite difficult. It's something they're very unused to." – *Practitioner working with children and young people out of home*

#### Children and young people with physical disabilities

- "Consultation with adolescents at the project level was very much about activities, thinking of creative ways of getting to the information ... We devised ... a map looking at where they live and they all had to take responsibility for some particular piece and place within the bits of the map: How would you get there? What would [you] need there? ... And we certainly felt that they got quite interested in it ... And they played ... [W]e had a bit where they were racing up and down ... a tennis court and they had to go up and around something if they

thought something should happen about it ... Or picking up stuff at the top of the court and bringing it back and putting ... it somewhere. And they worked very well. Now, again, it probably worked better with the younger age group than it did with the slightly older age group who saw some of that as a bit babyish and childish. But even still, with the older age group we ... felt that an interactive [approach was a good idea] ... We ended up with a collage ... So, I would certainly think that's a method ... I think you've got to be broad and flexible and use any medium that is going to work" – *Practitioner working with children and young people with physical disabilities*

#### **Children and young people of different ages**

- Children under 6 years: Invite the children to take photographs and ask them to tell the story through the photographs
- Children aged 7-11 years: Use a range of methodologies. Art can work very well with this group. This age group can be less willing to communicate within a group context that includes children they do not know. To accommodate this, use methods that enable them to respond on an individual basis
- Young people aged 13-15 years: Creative methodologies such as crafts and collage can work very well
- Older young people: Debates in which facilitators play devil's advocate can work well. *Children's consultation officer*

#### **8.5.4. How? – What Children and Young People say**

Participants in the focus groups were asked:

- To identify media of self-expression that they enjoyed and through which they felt they could make themselves understood
- Whether or not it mattered to them if being consulted is an enjoyable experience
- For their ideas on what might help to make consultation enjoyable.

Their responses to these questions are presented below.

#### **Preferred methodologies**

Participants consistently identified one or more of the following media of self-expression as methods through which they would enjoy and be able to express their opinions and ideas:

- Talking (one-to-one, in small groups, in large groups)
- Writing
- Creative writing (stories, poems)
- Drama
- Singing
- Dancing
- Arts and crafts (painting, drawing, model-making, sculpture, video-making, etc.)
- Games, including sporting activities.

While the frequency with which each of these methods were named precludes the identification of one as a particularly popular choice, it was interesting to find that many children and young people were quite comfortable with the idea of communicating simply by talking. Equally interesting was that only one participant specified "email" and that he added: "... but it's not better than talking". Only one group of young people with previous experience of these methods identified "public speaking", "debates" and "meetings" as ways in which they felt confident about being able to express their view.

**I enjoy *and* am good at expressing my opinions and ideas in these ways ...**

- "talking"
- "talking and acting it out"
- "acting it out (like a play)"
- "talking in a small group"
- "drama, singing, dancing"
- "huge group of people talking and expressing their own opinions"
- "writing"
- "singing and writing stories"
- "writing songs and writing poems"
- "painting and drawings"
- "writing (book, story)"
- "models"
- "make a video"
- "talking in a big group"
- "showing our talents"
- "singing, dancing, showing our talents"
- "through sport ... soccer"
- "email"
- "talking face-to-face on my own"
- "colouring"
- "a few games"
- "talking is probably the best way because it is easy and comes naturally. In a group one comment can start off a conversation"
- "debates"
- "public speaking"
- "meetings"
- "open discussion"

**Should consultation be an enjoyable experience and what helps to make it enjoyable?**

In response to the question of whether it was important for consultation to be an enjoyable experience:

- 28 participants said 'yes'
- 17 participants said 'no'
- 5 participants made no comment
- There are no precise figures available for one of the focus groups (comprising 12 young people), but their comments were recorded.

The majority of those who argued that consultation should be an enjoyable experience did not elaborate on this beyond saying that it is 'nice', 'better' and/or 'more interesting' if a consultation is fun. It was interesting to find that two focus groups comprising older young people posited the likely importance of fun to younger children. It was also interesting to find that many participants felt that the enjoyable elements of a consultation should not undermine its seriousness. Others suggested that it would be more important for a consultation to be 'interesting' and/or 'informal' rather than fun.

- "'Cause, like, you can't be serious all your life ... 'Cause you're a child, like, and you're supposed to have fun."
- "Yeah, it does 'cause you get more interested. Like, if it's boring, you're going to be messing."
- "Something like this ... is kinda formal and informal. 'Cause they're really serious questions and they need a serious answer. But, like, you need to be relaxed while you're talking about them. So it's kinda both in a way, if you know what I mean ... You can have a

- laugh and then be serious at the same time.”
- “I think it should be fun but still serious about it.”
- “I think it’s better if it’s fun.”

When asked what might help to make consultation enjoyable, participants made a number of suggestions:

- Certain methodologies – art, drama, music
- A “nice” facilitator with a good sense of humour
- Good refreshments
- Sufficient breaks
- Games
- A chance to meet new people
- An unfamiliar venue, i.e. being in a new place
- A playful, friendly, relaxing atmosphere
- Limiting the number of questions
- The duration of the consultation – it should not be too long.

Participants in two focus groups chose to re-emphasise that the most important thing was being afforded an opportunity to be heard. Making reference to a previous experience of consultation they had had, one of these groups argued that having your involvement and work appreciated was in itself a source of enjoyment. The other group asserted that meeting, talking, listening and being made to feel important is enough.

## 8.6. Implications

Key implications and recommendations arising in relation to each of the issues discussed in this chapter are presented below.

### What?

- Children and young people in and beyond Ireland, including children and young people experiencing or at risk of poverty or other forms of social exclusion, have been and are being consulted in relation to a diverse range of issues that are relevant to them and that constitute key areas of public policy at national and local level – education, health, housing, play and recreation, the environment, child protection, and so on. That they are being consulted, suggests that they can and do make meaningful contributions and that recognition of this is becoming more widespread. The challenge now, therefore, is to:
  - Raise awareness among *all* agencies whose work impacts on children/young people that children/young people are among their constituents and should be consulted
  - Enhance the number of opportunities for children and young people to be consulted in relation to issues affecting them.
- Opportunities for children and young people to contribute at the level of public policy in Ireland are few at present. Work is needed to promote and support their meaningful involvement at this level in both national and local contexts.
- It has been recommended by those who have addressed the stages at which children and young people might be consulted that involving children and young people at each stage of the consultative process is desirable. Doing so can be of personal benefit to participants and can enhance the likelihood of successful outcomes that properly reflect children’s/young people’s perspectives.

### Where?

- The literature reveals that a diverse range of settings is being used to consult with children and young people. The literature also suggests that advantages and disadvantages are likely to arise in relation to most settings. In selecting a setting, it will be important to

ensure that it is supportive of children's and young people's involvement by being accessible to them, acceptable to them and accommodating of their needs and capacities. In light of findings arising from the focus groups with children and young people, it is recommended that settings that enable face-to-face contact between organisers and participants are likely to be favoured by children and young people. The findings from the focus groups also underscore the importance of child-friendly settings.

#### **When?**

- The findings from the focus groups with children and young people underscore that, like adult professionals (including policy-makers), children and young people lead busy daily lives, would like this to be recognised and to have consultations timed to accommodate other priorities they will have. It is suggested that those organising future consultative processes/events with children/young people recognise this and, where possible, negotiate the time and duration of a given consultation with the children and young people participating.
- Children and young people can develop 'consultation fatigue' from being consulted too often, particularly when they are repeatedly consulted in the context of one-off, unrelated consultative events/processes. Those seeking to consult with children and young people should be strategic in identifying when it will be most important to consult with them. Furthermore, the risk of children/young people developing consultation fatigue in future is likely to be offset by:
  - A recognition of children/young people as a constituency or 'client group' and a corresponding commitment to structurally embed their voices in relevant decision-making processes
  - Integrating consultation with them into existing activities – for example, into existing areas of youth work or children's/young people's education.

#### **Who facilitates?**

- Like the literature reviewed, the policy-makers, practitioners and children and young people consulted for this study recognised the key role played by facilitation in determining the outcome of a consultation with children and young people. The findings offer no conclusive evidence as to whether it will be preferable for a facilitator to know or, alternatively, not know the children/young people s/he is facilitating. However, the children and young people consulted did provide a profile of a 'good facilitator': respectful, a good listener; friendly, informal, trustworthy, playful, non-judgemental, competent in their role, and older than the children and young people s/he is consulting. In addition, the findings of the focus groups would suggest that children/young people are likely to welcome the presence at a consultation they are involved in of an adult they know.

#### **How?**

- The research findings suggest that due consideration will need to be given to the manner in which issues are identified and questions phrased for children and young people. The recommended approach is one that is non-directive and enables children/young people to identify and discuss issues *they* consider to be important and to respond to questions in a manner that accurately represent their views and opinions.
- A diverse range of methods can and are being used. Pros and cons are likely to attach to each method. In identifying the methodology/methodologies to be used, the ages, needs and capacities of the children/young people in question should be the principal consideration. It is also recommended that, where possible, a range of complementary methodologies should be used to facilitate consultation with a given group of children/young people.

# Chapter Nine: Feedback and Evaluation

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## Introduction

This chapter engages with two final issues that are central to consultation with children and young people:

- Feedback
- Evaluation.

Each is discussed with reference to one of more aspects of the research undertaken for this study.

## 9.1. FEEDBACK

The issue of feedback can be broken down into a number of questions:

- Why provide feedback?
- When should feedback be given?
- What kinds of information should feedback include?
- In what formats should feedback be delivered?

### 9.1.1. Feedback – What the literature says

The literature reviewed for this study consistently underscores the importance of providing feedback to children and young people. Furthermore, it suggests that their perception of whether or not a consultation they have participated in has been meaningful will be determined in no small measure by whether or not they have received feedback:

“A particular finding of this mapping study was the connection respondents perceived between not receiving feedback and tokenism. This could suggest another diagram to Hart’s ladder and Save the Children’s Fund’s circle, ... a diagram of the *process*, that requires feedback to loop back into children’s and young people’s contributions ... Feedback to children and young people should be an essential part of their involvement in all decision-making, otherwise there is a danger that their involvement will be viewed as tokenistic”<sup>158</sup>

“The most common complaint from children and young people about consultation was that they had no idea what happened after they were consulted ... Feedback is arguably the single most important part of the consultation exercise – for the sake of successful future consultation and as a contribution to reducing negativity and cynicism of young people about the mainstream democratic process”<sup>159</sup>

“One of young people’s biggest complaints about participation or consultation exercises is that once the ostensible task is accomplished – the questionnaire results collated, the report written, the charter agreed – that is the last they ever hear of it. It is important that commissioning agencies make a commitment to giving feedback to young people and demonstrating that they have taken their contribution seriously”<sup>160</sup>

The literature also stresses the importance of providing feedback in a timely fashion, i.e. at a time that is acceptable to the children and young people involved. As White points out, a long delay in providing feedback can occasion a sense of “anti-climax” and dissipated

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<sup>158</sup> Dorrian et al (2001), p. 42 and p. 43. Roger Hart’s ladder is discussed in Chapter Three of this report and a representation of it can be found under Goal One in *Our Children: Their Lives* (p. 31). The Save the Children ‘circle’ referred to in this excerpt is Treseder’s model. This is represented in full in Chapter Three of this report.

<sup>159</sup> Borland et al (2001), p. 8.

<sup>160</sup> White (2000/2001), p. 42.



“energies and enthusiasm” among participants.<sup>161</sup> Accordingly, the literature recommends that children and young people should be given some feedback soon after the consultation has taken place *as well as* more comprehensive feedback once the policy-making process in question is concluded:

“Children and young people participating in the process should routinely be given information.”<sup>162</sup>

“Give people feedback following the consultation. This does not have to be a full report. It is better to give feedback shortly after the consultation if you can even if this means it is a summary sheet of the all the main points.”<sup>163</sup>

As regards the content of feedback, the literature suggests that children and young people might expect to receive information on:

- The findings of the consultation with them and other stakeholders
- How their views and ideas have been received
- How, if at all, their views and ideas have informed resulting decisions and actions.

As regards feedback formats, it is not essential to provide participating children and young people with full reports or equivalent documents. The provision of such material should not be ruled out, however: while this typically text-heavy documentation may be inaccessible to them, receipt of it can be appreciated by children and young people and serve to confirm that they have been involved in a serious initiative. It will be necessary for such material to be supplemented by the provision of information in accessible language and formats. The reports on the public consultation produced by the *National Children's Strategy* are a good example in this regard. As Madden suggests, a summary of key points can suffice. While children and young people may be content to receive a brief report or letter, other formats also warrant consideration – for example, an exhibition, an event or a face-to-face meeting. Finally, the literature suggests that, where possible, feedback should be sent directly to the children and young people concerned rather than through intermediaries such as teachers, youth workers or parents/guardians.<sup>164</sup>

### 9.1.2. Feedback – Interview findings

The status of feedback provision as a cornerstone of good practice was reinforced by three interviewees for this study. Another interviewee stressed the importance of ensuring that the information disseminated to children and young people is in age-appropriate language/formats and suggested that those who will be responsible for its future provision may need support in producing accessible information:

#### Providing Feedback

- “It’s feedback. It’s so important. They need to see that what they’ve said, that it’s gone somewhere ... that it’s not just being left ... I think what often happens ... [is that] you’re worried about how you’re going to get the information from them without actually thinking about where the information is going. I think [you need to] get that clear and ... follow it up with feedback ... so that they know they have been listened to” – *Health Board Practitioner*
- “They do need to get feedback ... [so] that they see what they’ve done ... It’s good for them to see the evidence of something ... even a written report” – *Practitioner working with young people out of home*

<sup>161</sup> White (2000/2001), p. 42.

<sup>162</sup> Borland et al (2001), p. 8.

<sup>163</sup> Madden (2001), p. 129

<sup>164</sup> Borland et al (2001), p. 8.

- "... Informing the children of the findings is most important" – *Children's consultation officer*
- "Agencies are going to have to get their heads round how information is disseminated because obviously it needs to be disseminated in a different way for children ... And maybe that is by training somebody up to go out and articulate information in a very clear, meaningful way for children so that they can digest it" – *Community and Enterprise Development Officer with a Local Authority*

Although interviewees were not asked a question relating specifically to feedback, it was interesting to find upon analysis of the findings that only four of the ten individuals interviewed broached the issue of feedback. It was also interesting to find that those who stressed its importance were all practitioners working directly with children/young people. This suggests that it may be necessary to raise awareness of and promote the importance of providing feedback, in particular among relevant public policy-makers and civil servants who will be involved in future consultations with children and young people.

### 9.1.3. Feedback – What children and Young People say

Participants in the focus groups were invited to respond to three questions relating to feedback:

- Is it important to provide children and young people who have contributed their ideas to an event, plan or project with information on, for example, how their ideas will be used or how a project they have contributed to is developing?
- Is there anything in particular that you would like to get feedback on?
- In what ways would you like to receive feedback?

Participants responses are presented below.

#### Is it important to receive feedback?

In response to the question of whether it is important to provide children and young people with feedback:

- 50 participants said 'yes'
- Not one participant said 'no'
- 6 participants made no comment

Thus, the importance of feedback was unequivocally affirmed by participants. In explaining its importance, they also affirmed that failure to provide feedback can lead children and young people to regard a consultation they have been involved in as a tokenistic exercise. Identified as a matter of principle by some, the receipt of feedback was viewed as essential by others:

- To feel that you have been heard
- To find out what the people who consulted you gained from having done so
- To see what happened as a result of what you said
- To know whether or not your ideas/views have been used and, if so, how.

#### Receiving Feedback

- Feedback is important "because we took part in it"
- "So you know how your information is used and what for"
- "It's a waste of time if you don't [receive feedback]"
- "Because then you know why you done it and you know what the people you done it for got out of it"
- "You want to know what happened with what you said ... what happened with everything"

- “We want to know, like, what happens”
- “‘Cause you’ll be able to know what’s going on and you’ll have an idea what this was done around it”
- “If we don’t hear anything, we think nothing’s happened and it feels tokenistic”
- “It’s an important way of knowing what’s happening”

In affirming its importance to them, participants in one focus group complained of not having been provided with feedback in the past. In questioning whether anything would come out of the focus group he was participating in for this study, a participant in another focus group indirectly suggested that his previous experience of consultation was disenchanting. His comments also underscore the importance of providing feedback in a timely fashion:

- “We’re always answering questions and then we’re never told anything”
- “What’s going to happen to my ideas? Is it just going to be threw away? Is it? ... Like, this is what I understand. Like, what are we saying this for ‘cause this isn’t going to happen ... I’ll probably be dying with age when this happens”

### **What to provide feedback on**

When asked what they would like to receive feedback on, participants made a number of suggestions in relation to feedback on this research project that might also apply to feedback in the round:

- How and where the project in question is going
- How useful children’s/young people’s contributions have proven to be
- How children’s/young people’s contributions have been used
- What other participating children/young people had to say
- The overall outcome of the initiative.

The majority of participants also indicated that they would like to receive any documentation produced in relation to this research project.

- “What all the other kids think”
- “What all this led to”
- “What the results came to”
- “What happened to our ideas”
- “We want to know where these pages are going” (reference to materials used to record responses during the consultations for this study)

### **Formats for feedback**

When asked about the formats in which they would like to receive feedback, participants consistently named one or more of the following formats:

- Letter (sent direct to participants)
- Face-to-face meeting
- Email.

Of these, a face-to-face meeting was the preference of most participants. However, in suggesting as much, they accepted that a letter or equivalent would suffice if a face-to-face meeting was not feasible for one or more reasons.

## 9.2. EVALUATION

The issue of evaluation can also be broken down into a number of questions:

- Why evaluate?
- Should children and young people be involved in the evaluation?
- What formats can be used to enable children and young people to contribute to the evaluation?

### 9.2.1. Evaluation – What the Literature says

Like feedback, evaluation is identified in the literature as an essential part of any consultation involving children and young people. As the following excerpts suggest, evaluation is essential for assessing the success of a consultation and determining how future consultative work can be enhanced to be more effective:

“Initiatives to enable youth participation in decision making should be reviewed regularly by the relevant government departments, agencies, regional and local authorities, local development agencies and voluntary organisations, so as to better understand the changing needs of young people in society and to produce more effective methodologies on an ongoing basis.”<sup>165</sup>

“At the very least, there should be some kind of evaluation process, which refers back to the original aims and objectives and which also allows for further review in the long term ... Exploring how successful a project has been might point to areas which are a logical place to start future work. Consultation and participation must be viewed not as a one-off event, but as a process of laying down a framework for improving conditions and opportunities of future generations while maximizing here and now the benefits for the current generation.”<sup>166</sup>

However, the literature also suggests that the need for evaluation is not sufficiently recognised and/or that evaluation is far from being a given of existing consultation with children and young people. The evidence would suggest that this is partly bound up with resource issues such as inadequate funding and time constraints. Indicating that lack of evaluation is a feature of consultation with children and young people in Ireland, Scotland and the UK, the following remarks are embedded in three of the mapping studies undertaken as part of the Carnegie Young People Initiative:

“Many organisations do not currently evaluate the impact of the involvement of young people in their initiatives; but they see the importance of such evaluation and plan to do so in the future. This would suggest that organisations do not yet see project evaluation as a primary and critical tool in working with and listening to the needs of young people, to further the learning of the organisation and to promote fuller participation and involvement.”<sup>167</sup>

“A high proportion of organisations have not evaluated the involvement of children and young people in decision making.”<sup>168</sup>

“Practice is rarely evaluated ... Better evaluation would give us a firmer basis on which to draw up a framework of minimum quality standards for organisations at national and local level in the public and voluntary sectors.”<sup>169</sup>

This has also been the experience of the researchers involved in this study: while a rich seam of information has been gathered on many and diverse consultative initiatives involving children and young people, including those experiencing poverty and other forms of social

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<sup>165</sup> O’Leary (2001), p. 62.

<sup>166</sup> White (2000/2001), p. 42.

<sup>167</sup> O’Leary (2001), p. 60. It should be noted, perhaps, that this is a general assessment of current status of evaluation in Ireland by O’Leary rather than an assessment of findings arising from her survey of organisations for her mapping study.

<sup>168</sup> Dorrian et al (2000/2001), p. 41.

<sup>169</sup> Cutler and Frost (2000), p. 3 and p. 81.

exclusion and in relation to public policy, the scope for evaluating these initiatives for the purposes of identifying good practice has been radically curtailed by the absence of formal, documented evaluations of these initiatives. As Cutler and Frost point out above, this low level of evaluation means that potentially valuable learning arising from previous and current consultative work with children and young people has been/is being lost.

As part of future work to enhance the number and nature of evaluations in this field, those responsible for doing so might bear in mind that the literature offers consensus regarding the need to involve children and young people in these evaluations. Clearly, their involvement will have to be facilitated by the use of evaluation tools/formats that accommodate children's and young people's ages and capacities. A number of organisations (the ISPCC, Save the Children) that already involve children/young people in evaluation have developed mechanisms for enabling children and young people of different ages and capacities to evaluate their involvement. As such, there is some material available that might be used or adapted for use to facilitate the involvement of children and young people in the evaluation of future consultations relating to public policy development.<sup>170</sup>

### 9.2.2. Evaluation – Survey findings

Survey recipients were asked to indicate whether they had evaluated any consultation(s) they had done with children and young people and, if so, whether children and young people had been involved in this evaluation process. As Tables 1 and 2 below indicate:

- 71% of responding organisations said that they had not yet evaluated the involvement of children/young people in their decision-making/policy-making. This finding is at odds with O'Leary's survey findings in this regard (see section 8.1.1.), but consistent with her general assessment of the current status of evaluation in Ireland and in keeping with the findings of the literature review.
- More voluntary organisations are likely to engage in a process of evaluation than statutory organisations.
- Of the 29% of organisations (32 organisations) which indicated that they had evaluated children's/young people's involvement in their decision-making/policy-making, 33% (5 organisations) indicated that participating children/young people had been involved in the evaluations. While this figure is low, it is no lower than the percentage of staff members that have been involved (33%) and higher than the percentage of independent consultants that have been involved at the evaluation stage (27%).

**Table 1**

Has the organisation evaluated the involvement of children/young people in its decision-making/policy making?

	<b>No.</b>	<b>%</b>
Yes	13	29
Not yet	32	71
<b>Total</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>100</b>

**Table 2**

Who plays the key role in evaluating the project/process of consultation with children/young people?

	<b>No.</b>	<b>%</b>
Staff member	5	33
Participating children/young people	5	33
Independent consultant	4	27
Government Department	0	0
Voluntary youth leader	1	7
<b>Total</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>100</b>

<sup>170</sup> See, for example, Miller (1996), p. 36 and the ISPCC's/NSPCC's 'Viewpoint' questionnaires for children and young people of different ages (n.d.).

We would suggest that these findings are a source of concern for the following reasons:

- They confirm that the status of evaluation as an integral part of any consultation process is not being recognised in a pro-active way. This may be a side-effect of, for example, organisations having inadequate resources or time to undertake evaluations. Nevertheless, the fact that existing opportunities for children and young people to be consulted at any level are not being or have not yet been evaluated means that potentially valuable lessons are being or may be lost. Such lessons might contribute to the development of good practice in relation to consulting children and young people at the level of public policy development.
- The finding that statutory organisations are less likely to engage in a process of evaluation than voluntary organisations suggests that an 'evaluation culture' has yet to become firmly embedded as part-and-parcel of the operation of governance and raises the question of whether the statutory sector will follow through on its responsibility to take a lead in promoting the importance of evaluation.
- While it might be welcomed that children and young people are no less likely to be involved than staff members or independent consultants in evaluations of the opportunities that have been created to enable them to contribute to organisations' decision-making/policy-making, the fact that they have not been involved in each of the evaluations that have taken place suggests that organisations may not recognise or adequately appreciate the importance of children's and young people's assessments for the future development and enhancement of these opportunities.

On a more positive note, responding organisations that have not yet undertaken formal evaluations were keen to highlight and promote the impact of children's/young people's involvement on their organisational decision-making processes:

- "At our consultative conference held in May 2001, two island young people contributed to one of the workshops which was extremely beneficial in terms demonstrating the issues being experienced by young people in a remote rural and island community."
- "Children need to feel that their views are valued. They need an environment which is conducive to expressing their views. This will involve providing them with regular feedback on issues named by them. Helping children/young people understand how decisions are made within an organisation as large as a health board and explaining the constraints which may be placed on ... all their views and ideas will prove challenging."
- "As an organisation, we are keen to promote benefits of consulting children and young people as they are adults of tomorrow. Consultation with young people ensures that new policies being developed are 'young people' proofed!"
- "Benefits to the young people are probably immediate in terms of opportunity to discuss/raise issues and feeling valued. We have work to do in feeding back information so that there are mid-term benefits and the input of the consultation results into policy and strategies that will hopefully yield more long-term benefits."
- "We are a voluntary organisation with a largely democratic operational structure and a commitment to equality of access to guiding for all. The non-formal educational models employed thrive in a partnership environment where ownership and involvement on even minor decisions is invaluable. Apart from the information gained and the representative viewpoints accessed, the actual process itself enables members to discuss and prepare as well as anticipate their involvement in change etc. and to discover and reassert their value as citizens."
- "Youth Work Programme is planned through on-going evaluation and consultation with Traveller youth; however this can often be frustrating for young people and workers as resources are limited in how we can respond effectively to young people's needs. In terms of effective policy-making, young people cannot see the effects of their opinions as policy

changes are often very slow to take effect on the ground; they don't see the impact in their own day-to-day lives."

- "What has emerged from our experiences of the participation of children/young people is that effective participation has a number of elements, all of which must be in place. The young people need preparation and support which is non-directional, different groups need different approaches yet all must be treated with equal weight (major implications). Adults need as much, if not more support. This is a challenge especially when there is not a consensus among adults on complex issues."
- "It is extremely important for young people to be involved in the decision making processes of all they do as this gives them a true sense of belonging and also leads to them taking ownership of their groups and their own lives. As well as young people being involved in the decision making process it is also important that their opinions are valued and taken on board and not just given as lip service."

### 9.2.3. Evaluation – Interview findings

Three interviewees did raise the issue of evaluation. A Health Board practitioner stressed the importance of involving children and young people in this stage of the consultation process: "... involve them in all stages if possible ... in particular the evaluation". A public policy-maker at national level, meanwhile, emphasised the importance of evaluation in more general terms, arguing that it was essential for identifying and demonstrating the added-value that children/young people might bring to public policy development in Ireland:

"... what I would like to see happen is a ... seamless process developing, which I think we are beginning to see ... of consultation not only in policy development, but in implementation and, critically, in evaluation. I think we've paid too little attention to the evaluative aspects of public policy development ... [D]o some evaluation on value-added. Because people won't stick with this if they don't believe there's anything coming from it ... We have to build in some sort of evaluation ... to this. There's no way that this process ... will thrive if it's not seen by the relevant people as adding value" – *Public policy-maker at national level*

The third interviewee, a Community and Enterprise Development Officer with a Local Authority, spoke indirectly to the issue of evaluation and in so doing injected another dimension to it. Reflecting a view articulated, for example, by Cutler and Frost,<sup>171</sup> she posited the importance of developing and implementing a monitoring and reporting process that requires organisations to evaluate and submit regular reports on what they are doing to progress work in the area of consultation with children and young people, including in relation to public policy development. Identifying such a process as both a stick and a carrot, this interviewee asserted that a monitoring and reporting requirement would be an effective means of ensuring that relevant organisations implement their responsibility to consult with children and young people:

"I think at the very least, and I think this about consultation full-stop, agencies should have to report on the nature and level of consultation they've undertaken ... what mechanisms they've used ... If there is a responsibility to set up children's fora to make sure that children's voices are heard, then in their annual reports, people should have to demonstrate very clearly where they've used children's fora to input ... The reality is, if you want it to happen, tabs are going to have to be kept to make sure that it is happening ... In ways it wouldn't be a support to say 'Well, you have to tell us how you're doing this.' But in another way, in a funny kind of skewed way, it would be. Because they would actually do it. And they would actually learn if they had to comply with these reporting mechanisms." – *Community and Enterprise Development Officer with a Local Authority*

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<sup>171</sup> Cutler and Frost (2000), p. 81-82.

We concur with this view. The development of future good practice will not only require that organisations evaluate their consultative work with children and young people, but that the findings arising from such evaluations are disseminated as widely as possible so that others might also reap the benefits of the lessons learned. Consideration will need to be given, therefore, to how information arising from a monitoring and reporting process might best be disseminated. The National Children's Research Dissemination Unit provided for under Goal Two of the National Children's Strategy might have a role to play in this regard. We would suggest that in considering the establishment of a formal, nationwide process of monitoring, reporting and dissemination, the National Children's Office might consider Children in Scotland's Participation Network<sup>172</sup> as a potential model. The Network facilitates the exchange of experiences, ideas and learning among organisations and individuals that already consult or are planning to consult children and young people at different levels of decision-making, including at the level of public policy. If such a network was to be established, the coordinating role played by Children in Scotland in relation to the Scottish Participation Network might be integrated into the remit of the National Children's Research Dissemination Unit.

#### 9.2.4. Evaluation – What Children and Young People say

Participants in the focus groups were asked three questions relating to the issue of evaluation:

- Does it matter whether or not you are given a chance to say what you thought of a consultation you have participated in?
- When is a good time to say what you think – for example, during the consultation, immediately after or some time soon after?
- What are good ways for you to be able to say what you think about a consultation you have participated in?

Their responses are presented below.

##### Evaluating a consultation

In response to the question of whether or not they would like to be afforded an opportunity to evaluate a consultation they have participated in:

- 42 participants said 'yes'
- 5 participants said that it did not matter
- 1 participant said that s/he would like to have the choice
- 7 participants made no comment.

Thus, a very significant majority of participants indicated that they would like to be involved in evaluating a consultation process/event they had participated in. Most participants did not provide a reason for this. Among the reasons that were given was that children's/young people's evaluations would assist organisations with identifying how they might improve their work in this area. Those who said it did not matter did not elaborate.

##### Evaluation

- "We should be allowed to say if it is nice"
- "You have to express your feelings"
- "'Course it's important 'cause if you didn't, there'd be no point"
- "Yeah ... you have to say what you thought about it"
- "If you didn't like it, you'd write you didn't like it"
- "Because the next time you'd know what to do"

<sup>172</sup> The following documents relating to this Network have been produced by Children in Scotland and The Carnegie United Kingdom Trust: *The Participation Network: The Way Forward*; *The Participation Network: Examples and Experiences of Participation*; *Directory of the Participation Network. First Edition (Spring 2001)*. In addition, a Network bulletin has been created. Entitled *Taking Part*, the first two editions were published in Winter 2000 and Summer 2001.



The children's and young people's evaluations of the focus group consultations are presented in Appendix 4.

### **Timing evaluation**

As regards a preferable time for doing the evaluation:

- 4 participants indicated that they would prefer to do the evaluation during the course of the consultation
- 29 participants said that they would prefer to do the evaluation immediately after the consultation
- 6 participants said that they would prefer to do the evaluation either immediately after or some time soon after the consultation
- 4 participants made other comments
- 11 participants made no comment.

Those participants who said they would prefer to do the evaluation during or immediately after a consultation explained their preferences by saying that:

- It would be easier for them to remember different aspects of the consultation if they evaluated these either during or immediately after it
- The evaluation would take less time if it was done during or immediately after the consultation
- They would not necessarily participate in an evaluation – e.g. complete an evaluation form – that took place some time after the consultation itself had been completed.

Of the four participants that made other comments, one said that she did not consider this to be an important question while three others said that they would be willing to evaluate a consultation they had participated in “any time”.

#### **Evaluate during the consultation**

- “So you don’t forget”
- “Straight away, because you forget”
- “When you’re going through it”

#### **Evaluate immediately after the consultation**

- “To remember it”
- “At the end, as you’re going out”
- “Because ... a few weeks later you’re not going to remember everything”
- “Just after, as you’re going out the door”
- “To be honest with you, I’d like to do it straight away because I’d forget about it”
- “Finish today because I’ll forget all about it”

#### **Evaluate some time soon after the consultation**

- “I’d say we should come back ... in a couple of days ... in a smaller group and you might be able to talk better ... Two at a time. Say, twenty minutes each person, like”

### **Evaluation formats**

When asked what formats they would like evaluations to take, participants consistently named one or more of the following formats:

- Self-completion form or questionnaire with open and/or closed questions
- Letter or equivalent ‘blank page’
- Face-to-face conversation.

One participant expressed a preference for email while another suggested that he would be happy to discuss his views on a consultation he had participated in with a relevant person over the telephone. Those who preferred the idea of a self-completion questionnaire

comprising closed questions did so on the grounds that it would take less time to complete and/or that it would assist with the provision of feedback that would be useful. Those who articulated a preference for a questionnaire comprising open questions or a 'blank page' format said that they would like to decide freely on the aspects of a consultation they wished to comment on.

### 9.3. Implications

Implications and recommendations arising from the findings presented in this chapter are presented below.

#### Feedback

- The provision of feedback in a timely fashion and in formats that accommodate the different ages and capacities of children and young people is a cornerstone of good practice. Providing feedback will also serve to demonstrate to the children and young people concerned that they have been involved in a meaningful process.
- Feedback ought to include the following information:
  - Key findings arising from the consultation with the children/young people concerned as well as any other stakeholders
  - How the children's/young people's views have been received
  - How, if at all, their views and ideas have informed resulting decisions and actions
  - The overall outcome of the initiative children/young people have been consulted about.
- Awareness of the importance of providing feedback needs to be raised among relevant organisations and individuals, in particular public policy-makers.
- Organisations may need to provide support in developing accessible feedback for children and young people.

#### Evaluation

- Evaluation levels at present are low, suggesting that its importance needs to be impressed upon relevant organisations and that they need to be adequately resourced to undertake evaluations.
- Involving children and young people in the evaluation is a function of good practice. It will help to ensure that consultative work with them can be improved and to determine the nature of the added value that children/young people can bring to public policy-making.
- The findings of the focus groups with children and young people suggest that evaluations involving them should occur, where possible, immediately after the consultation has taken place. Furthermore, where possible, the formats should be negotiated with the children and young people concerned since they are likely to have preferences as regards the use of a 'blank page' or a more directive approach.
- A monitoring, reporting and dissemination process should be established at national level to promote consultative work with children/young people by relevant organisations and to ensure that key lessons arising from such work are shared.

# Chapter Ten: Conclusion

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## Introduction

In this concluding chapter, we bring together the recommendations arising from our research findings for consideration in the development of good practice for consulting children and young people, including those experiencing poverty or other forms of social exclusion, at the level of public policy development in Ireland. In addition, we summarise the measures identified by the policy-makers and practitioners whom we surveyed and interviewed as priority actions for facilitating the creation and development of meaningful, inclusive and sustainable opportunities for children and young people to be consulted at this level of decision-making.

As we illustrated in Chapter One, the time is ripe for embarking on the project of structurally embedding children's and young people's voices in relevant public policy-making processes at national and local level in Ireland:

- Consultation with civil society has become an established function of public policy-making in Ireland.
- Civil society has been afforded opportunities to be heard in the context of public policy developments relating to poverty and social exclusion issues, the most recent consultation of this kind being that which took place in relation to the review of the NAPS.
- The right of children and young people to be heard is enshrined in the *UN Convention on the Rights of the Child*, which Ireland ratified in 1992 and is obliged to implement under international law.
- There is evidence of opportunities having been created at international, European and country level for children and young people to be heard in relation to decision-making processes affecting them, including at the level of public policy development.
- Launched in 2000, Ireland's *National Children's Strategy* provides a bedrock of legitimacy for hearing the voices of children and young people – Goal One establishes this project as a matter of national public policy while its coordinated and systematic implementation can be facilitated by the new structures created under the auspices of the Strategy (the National Children's Office, the National Children's Advisory Council, etc.).
- Opportunities have been created prior and subsequent to the launch of the *National Children's Strategy* (2000) for children and young people to be heard in relation to a range of public policy issues affecting them. Within this, a small number of opportunities have been created to enable children and young people experiencing poverty and social exclusion to contribute their views to public policy developments and service provision relating to areas of poverty and social exclusion – for example, youth homelessness, guidance provision for young people at risk of social exclusion and residential care.

As we illustrated in Chapter One, the practice of hearing children's and young people's voices remains in its infancy in Ireland. As such, the key to ensuring that meaningful, inclusive and sustainable opportunities are created for *all* children and young people to be heard in relation to public policy developments affecting them will be effective management of the process at a macro level. For this reason, we would suggest that the National Children's Office and the National Children's Advisory Council have a lead role to play in facilitating consideration and implementation of the recommendations presented in this concluding chapter. Additional key players at a macro level will include parent Government Departments, County and City Development Boards and national and/or umbrella NGOs working with and/or on behalf of children and young people, including those experiencing

or at risk of poverty and social exclusion. In the first instance, these actors can support the development of good practice by:

- Promoting awareness among all relevant statutory agencies and NGOs at national and local level of the direct or indirect impacts of their work on children and young people and thus of children's and young people's status as 'customers' who have a right to be consulted by them
- Adopting a non-prescriptive approach to encouraging and supporting agencies in their efforts to consult with children and young people in a manner that is in keeping with good practice
- Establishing a monitoring and reporting process or equivalent to ensure that emerging lessons can be shared.

While it will be desirable for many of the recommendations presented below to be addressed at a macro level in the first instance, we would suggest that individual statutory agencies and NGOs might take on board these recommendations when planning consultative work with children and young people. Of particular relevance will be recommendations presented under the following headings:

- Ethical issues
- Additional planning issues
- Implementation issues
- Feedback and evaluation.

By way of final comment and prior to presenting the recommendations, we would like to emphasise our perspective on the issues addressed in this report, namely: although these issues are numerous and some of them complex, we are confident that good practice can be arrived at if they are managed effectively at a macro level and if common sense and imagination prevail in their implementation. In this way and through a non-prescriptive and exploratory approach on the part of all concerned, we believe that the individual and collective voices of all children and young people in Ireland can be heard.

### **10.1. Next Steps – What Policy-Makers and Practitioners say**

The policy-makers and practitioners who were surveyed and interviewed for this study were asked to identify priority measures for enhancing the quantity and quality of opportunities for children and young people to be consulted. In responding, they were asked to take particular account of:

- Children and young people experiencing or at risk of poverty or other forms of social exclusion
- Consultation with children and young people at the level of public policy.

The measures identified by them are as follows:

#### **Measures to be taken**

- Raise awareness among relevant organisations of the provisions of Goal One of the National Children's Strategy.
- Enable public policy-makers to recognise public policy issues that may not be children's issues as being relevant to children and young people.
- Ensure that consultation with children and young people remains on the public policy agenda and is placed on the agendas of relevant organisations at national, regional and local level.
- Promote the creation within relevant organisations of a culture and ethos that enables children's and young people's voices to be heard.

- Provide at a macro level for the proper management of the implementation of Goal One.
- Provide information to practitioners on a regular basis on how they can contribute to the implementation of different stages and aspects of Goal One of the National Children's Strategy.
- Educate people in such a way as to alleviate anxieties they might have about whether and/or how to consult with children and young people.
- Provide training to relevant staff to equip them with the necessary skills to facilitate consultation with children and young people.
- Provide children and young people with the support and skills they need to participate in consultation to the best of their ability.
- Adequately resource consultation with children and young people by providing the necessary funds and personnel.
- Identify and arrive at consensus on fundamental principles that should underlie consultation with children and young people.
- Develop and disseminate guidelines on good practice for consulting children and young people.
- Enhance understanding of diversity and how it might best be engaged with and ensure that organisations have an anti-racism policy in place so that children and young people from cultural/ethnic minorities are not excluded from consultation.
- Promote the importance of planning, feedback and evaluation as cornerstones and functions of good practice with regard to consultation.
- Require of organisations that they develop codes of practice so as to facilitate accountability and transparency in relation to consultation with children and young people.
- Provide for an equitable and inclusive approach to consultation with children and young people that will ensure that children and young people experiencing poverty and other forms of social exclusion are involved.
- Establish a monitoring and reporting process that requires relevant organisations to submit regular reports on work that they have done in relation to consultation with children and young people.
- Use the sectoral experience to facilitate a cross-sectoral approach to consultation with children and young people, one that entails coordination and cooperation between relevant organisations.

Two much broader measures were also identified as being advantageous to enhancing the scope for consultation with children and young people:

- Enhance transparency with regard to the policy-making process at local and national level in Ireland so that practitioners on the ground and children and young people have a better understanding of how this process operates.
- Promote improved communication and cooperation within and between relevant agencies and enhance professionals' awareness of each other's roles and how they are linked.

## 10.2. Future Steps – Implications and Recommendations arising from the Research Findings

The implications and recommendations represented below are to be understood as future steps that need to be taken in the interests of creating meaningful, equitable and sustainable opportunities for children and young people, including those experiencing poverty and other forms of social exclusion, to be heard in relation to public policy developments affecting them at national and local level.

### Defining ‘Consultation’

There is a need for the National Children’s Office and the National Children’s Advisory Council in consultation with other relevant/interested parties to:

- Move towards an agreed and shared understanding of what ‘consultation’ ought to mean as a mechanism for involving children and young people in relevant public policy developments at national and local level
- Consider the involvement of children and young people in arriving at this definition and/or in its translation into language and formats that are accessible to children and young people of different ages and capacities
- Agree on any differences that *ought* to exist between consultation as mechanism for involving adults and as a mechanism for involving children/young people in public policy development
- Seriously consider, in light of its far-reaching implications, whether a ‘positive action’ approach should be taken with regard to the treatment of views put forward by children and young people and/or by children and young people experiencing poverty or other forms of social exclusion in the context of consultative processes relating to public policy.

### To Consult or Not To Consult?

- The creation of meaningful and sustainable opportunities for children and young people to be consulted will be facilitated by promoting rather than stifling debate on the question of whether or not children and young people should be consulted in relation to public policy development at national and local level.
- Those with responsibility for promoting consultation with children and young people will need to do more than reference national public policy provisions in this regard if policy-makers and professionals are to be convinced of the value of consulting children and young people. That survey recipients identified children’s and young people’s *right* to be heard as the principal ‘very significant reason’ for consulting them suggests that a rights-based approach should be taken to promoting consultation with children and young people.
- There is a need to assess and raise awareness levels, in particular among policy-makers, of the relevance of their remit to children and young people and thus of children and young people as a ‘client’ group that should be considered for inclusion in future consultative processes relating to public policy.
- Supports, in particular funding, training for future facilitators and good practice guidelines need to be provided if organisations are to implement consultation processes with children and young people.
- Children and young people, including those experiencing poverty or other forms of social exclusion, can make a meaningful contribution to public policy development, but they

must receive support that enables them to do so.

- If done in meaningful and appropriate ways, consultation with socially excluded children and young people could be a function of social inclusion at both the micro level of the individual and the macro level of public policy development and service provision.

## Resource Issues

### Finance and funding

- The amounts and conditions of funding made available will play a key role in determining the extent to which inclusive and sustainable opportunities for children and young people to be consulted can be created. Due regard will need to be given to the additional costs that can arise to support the involvement of children and young people experiencing or at risk of social exclusion. The interview findings reveal different views on who has responsibility for funding work in this area. However, there is an expectation that the National Children's Office and Government Departments will play a role in this regard. Interviewees were also divided on whether funding will lead to the creation of opportunities or whether the creation of opportunities will lead to the availability of funding. Several interviewees suggested that making consultation with children and young people a requirement or condition of funding might act as an incentive to organisations to do it. In light of these findings, the National Children's Office and others with a responsibility for progressing work in this area, should aim to assess and agree:
  - The nature and amount of resources required, including additional resources required to support the involvement of socially excluded children and young people
  - How these resources might be provided (funding structures)
  - By whom resources might be provided (funding sources)
  - Conditions of funding, including duration of funding
  - If, when and in what ways, a funding requirement or equivalent should be created.
- Future work in this area might also benefit from the creation and dissemination of sufficiently comprehensive information on the cost areas associated with this type of work.
- Some of the additional supports required to facilitate the equitable involvement in consultative processes of children/young people experiencing/most at risk of social exclusion have cost implications. To offset any possibility that these additional costs might curtail an equitable approach to consultation with children and young people, it is suggested that relevant statutory organisations and NGOs:
  - Draw up and disseminate an inclusion policy or equivalent
  - Make inclusion one aspect of future evaluations of their work in this area.
- Given the unpredictable nature of this area of work, it is suggested that funders adopt a flexible approach to funding this work and that those seeking funding clarify in their applications the nature and degree of the 'risk factor' associated with the particular consultative initiative they are seeking funding for.

### Time

- Due consideration needs to be given to the time required to undertake consultative work with children and young people. Awareness also needs to be raised that consulting certain groups of children and young people at risk of or experiencing social exclusion may prove especially time intensive – for example, children/young people with certain physical disabilities are likely to need additional time to fashion their responses.
- In cases where children/young people are one of several groups to be consulted in relation to a given area of public policy, it is recommended that consultation with them is initiated prior to embarking on consultation with these other groups.

### Personnel

- Relevant organisations need to consider the options available to them with regard to

staffing this kind of work: Will it be necessary and possible to appoint an additional member of staff on a full-time, part-time or occasional basis? What is the scope for involving volunteers in one or more ways? To what extent and within what professions is it not only desirable, but feasible for this role to be integrated into the responsibilities of existing staff – for example, teachers and youth workers?

#### **Training**

- Training of individuals to manage, facilitate, supervise or assist with consultation with children and young people is already recognised as a key resource issue. With regard to it, we would suggest that:
  - Training should be made available to professionals who already work with children and young people directly and not only to those who have no previous experience of doing so
  - Varying levels of existing expertise and experience should be reflected in the development of different training programmes
  - It may be desirable in some cases to provide additional training that raises or enhances trainees' understanding of the experiences/abilities of children/young people who are experiencing/most at risk of social exclusion – for example, issues and attitudes around disability, Traveller culture, multiculturalism and youth homelessness.

#### **Supporting Children and Young People**

- It is recognised that children and young people need to be supported to participate in consultative processes. Thought needs to be given to what support is needed and how it might be provided in the short-, medium- and long-term. At a minimum, children and young people should be equipped with:
  - A knowledge of public policies affecting them
  - An understanding of the public policy-making process at national and local level
  - The skills that will enable them to contribute effectively and to the best of their ability.

### **Ethical Issues**

#### **Consent**

- With regard to consent from parents/guardians, the following issues warrant consideration:
  - What consent should be sought for in the context of consulting children and young people in relation to public policy development
  - Who to seek consent from in the event that the parent/guardian of a child or young person is not available or able to give consent for one or more reasons
  - Who to seek consent from in the case of children/young people in residential care and children/young people out of home
  - Whether there may be instances when an initial refusal of consent from a parent/guardian or other adult might be re-negotiated and/or over-ridden in cases where a child/young person has indicated a wish to be consulted.
- With regard to consent from children and young people, the following issues need to be addressed
  - Promoting the principle of voluntary participation among children/young people, their parents/guardians and other relevant professionals
  - The status of seeking formal consent from children/young people as a principle of ethical good practice in the context of consulting children/young people in relation to public policy development
  - The scope for seeking consent from children/young people in light of children's and young people's competency to give informed consent and the question of how and by whom their competency might be established
  - Stages during the consultative process as a whole when children/young people should be afforded opportunities to re-confirm or withdraw consent.



- Methods/mechanisms for seeking formal consent from parents/guardians and/or children/young people.

### **Confidentiality**

- Careful consideration should be given to the status of confidentiality as an ethical touchstone of good practice as regards consulting children and young people in relation to public policy development.
- If consensus is reached on its status as such, then awareness raising on the importance of confidentiality is needed among all those involved in future consultations with children and young people in relation to public policy.
- It will be desirable to arrive at consensus on:
  - The meaning of confidentiality in the context of public policy development – when should it mean confidentiality or “public confidentiality” (anonymity/quasi-anonymity)?
  - Where confidentiality is being practiced, who should be afforded access to the identity of participating children/young people and/or their contributions
  - Whether children and young people should be afforded the choice of whether information provided by them is to be treated in confidence and, if it is not, the choice of what form of confidentiality their contributions should be subject to.
- It will be important to explain to children/young people the rules that have been agreed about confidentiality in relation to a particular consultation.
- Awareness raising is needed around the issue of “network confidentiality” and how to address it.
- In light of *Children First* and *Our Duty to Care*, consensus is needed on whether mandatory reporting should be operational in the context of consulting children and young people in relation to public policy development.

### **Transparency**

- Awareness raising is needed on:
  - What information children/young people should be provided with
  - At what stages they should be provided with one or more pieces of information
  - Formats in which to provide information to children/young people.

### **Equality and Inclusion**

- It will be necessary to identify and provide for ethical approaches to equality/inclusion at the levels of:
  - Access to consultative processes/events;
  - Involvement in consultative processes/events;
  - Outcome of consultative processes/events (treatment of children’s and young people’s views).
- In terms of providing for the equitable involvement of children/young people at risk of or experiencing poverty or other forms of social exclusion, careful thought must be given to whether it will be more appropriate to consult with them in integrated settings or segregated settings. The findings of the focus groups with children and young people suggest that it will be desirable to negotiate the setting with children/young people.

### **Respect and Integrity**

- Awareness raising is needed on ways of demonstrating respect to children and young people.
- It will be important to promote the importance of integrity and honesty at all stages of a consultation involving children and young people.

## Additional Planning Issues

### Direct and indirect consultation

- In the interests of future good practice with regard to consulting children and young people at the level of public policy development, due consideration ought to be given to:
  - When and on what grounds it may be more appropriate to consult with children/young people directly or indirectly in relation to public policy development
  - When and on what grounds it may be more appropriate to consult only with relevant representative organisations or, alternatively, with children and young people through their representative organisations
  - Whether efforts can and ought to be made to ascertain that a decision by policy-makers and/or organisations not to consult with children and young people directly has been made in good faith
  - In cases of mediated consultation with children and young people, how to assist organisations with ensuring that they act both faithfully and strategically in their presentation of the voices/views of the children and young people they have consulted in relation to a given public policy issue
  - In light of current low levels of consultation with children and young people at the level of political decision-making, how to quantitatively and qualitatively increase the opportunities for the direct and mediated involvement of children and young people in decision-making relating to public policy development.

### Legal and protection issues

- A piece of research is needed on how best to respond to legal and protection issues arising in relation to consultation with children and young people at the level of public policy development. Among the issues this piece of research should address are: Garda clearance, mandatory reporting and insurance. Subject to their approval at macro-level, information and recommendations in the form of practical 'checklists' or guidelines should be disseminated to all relevant organisations.

### Making contact with children and young people

- In the interests of future good practice, the following actions should be taken in relation to the issue of making contact with children and young people:
  - Raise awareness among relevant policy-makers of the importance of using contact routes that are safe for *and* acceptable to children and young people
  - Raise awareness of the fact that adults can act as gatekeepers and develop and implement a preventive plan to combat this issue in the medium- to long-term
  - Identify when it will be appropriate to issue individual or, alternatively, group invitations to children and young people
  - Consider how invitations might best be delivered and what steps ought to be taken prior to doing so – for example, giving prior notification to and/or seeking prior consent from parents/guardians.

## Implementation Issues

### What?

- Children and young people in and beyond Ireland, including children and young people experiencing or at risk of poverty or other forms of social exclusion, have been and are being consulted in relation to a diverse range of issues that are relevant to them and that constitute key areas of public policy at national and local level – education, health, housing, play and recreation, the environment, child protection, and so on. That they are being consulted, suggests that they can and do make meaningful contributions and that recognition of this is becoming more widespread. The challenge now, therefore, is to:
  - Raise awareness among *all* agencies whose work impacts on children/young people that children/young people are among their constituents and should be consulted
  - Enhance the number of opportunities for children and young people to be consulted in relation to issues affecting them.

- Opportunities for children and young people to contribute at the level of public policy in Ireland are few at present. Work is needed to promote and support their meaningful involvement at this level in both national and local contexts.
- It has been recommended by those who have addressed the stages at which children and young people might be consulted that involving children and young people at each stage of the consultative process is desirable. Doing so can be of personal benefit to participants and can enhance the likelihood of successful outcomes that properly reflect children's/young people's perspectives.

#### **Where?**

- The literature reveals that a diverse range of settings is being used to consult with children and young people. The literature also suggests that advantages and disadvantages are likely to arise in relation to most settings. In selecting a setting, it will be important to ensure that it is supportive of children's and young people's involvement by being accessible to them, acceptable to them and accommodating of their needs and capacities. In light of findings arising from the focus groups with children and young people, it is recommended that settings that enable face-to-face contact between organisers and participants are likely to be favoured by children and young people. The findings from the focus groups also underscore the importance of child-friendly settings.

#### **When?**

- The findings from the focus groups with children and young people underscore that, like adult professionals (including policy-makers), children and young people lead busy daily lives, would like this to be recognised and to have consultations timed to accommodate other priorities they will have. It is suggested that those organising future consultative processes/events with children/young people recognise this and, where possible, negotiate the time and duration of a given consultation with the children and young people participating.
- Children and young people can develop 'consultation fatigue' from being consulted too often, particularly when they are repeatedly consulted in the context of one-off, unrelated consultative events/processes. Those seeking to consult with children and young people should be strategic in identifying when it will be most important to consult with them. Furthermore, the risk of children/young people developing consultation fatigue in future is likely to be offset by:
  - A recognition of children/young people as a constituency or 'client group' and a corresponding commitment to structurally embed their voices in relevant decision-making processes
  - Integrating consultation with them into existing activities – for example, into existing areas of youth work or children's/young people's education.

#### **Who facilitates?**

- Like the literature reviewed, the policy-makers, practitioners and children and young people consulted for this study recognised the key role played by facilitation in determining the outcome of a consultation with children and young people. The findings offer no conclusive evidence as to whether it will be preferable for a facilitator to know or, alternatively, not know the children/young people s/he is facilitating. However, the children and young people consulted did provide a profile of a 'good facilitator': respectful, a good listener; friendly, informal, trustworthy, playful, non-judgemental, competent in their role, and older than the children and young people s/he is consulting. In addition, the findings of the focus groups would suggest that children/young people are likely to welcome the presence at a consultation they are involved in of an adult they know.

#### **How?**

- The research findings suggest that due consideration will need to be given to the manner in which issues are identified to and questions phrased for children and young people. The recommended approach is one that is non-directive and enables children/young people to identify and discuss issues *they* consider to be important and to respond to questions in a manner that accurately represent their views and opinions.

- A diverse range of methods can and are being used. Pros and cons are likely to attach to each method. In identifying the methodology/methodologies to be used, the ages, needs and capacities of the children/young people in question should be the principal consideration. It is also recommended that, where possible, a range of complementary methodologies should be used to facilitate consultation with a given group of children/young people.

## Feedback and Evaluation

### Feedback

- The provision of feedback in a timely fashion and in formats that accommodate the different ages and capacities of children and young people is a cornerstone of good practice. Providing feedback will also serve to demonstrate to the children and young people concerned that they have been involved in a meaningful process.
- Feedback ought to include the following information:
  - Key findings arising from the consultation with the children/young people concerned as well as any other stakeholders
  - How the children's/young people's views have been received
  - How, if at all, their views and ideas have informed resulting decisions and actions
  - The overall outcome of the initiative children/young people have been consulted about.
- Awareness of the importance of providing feedback needs to be raised among relevant organisations and individuals, in particular public policy-makers.
- Organisations may need support in developing accessible feedback for children and young people.

### Evaluation

- Evaluation levels at present are low, suggesting that its importance needs to be impressed upon relevant organisations and that they need to be adequately resourced to undertake evaluations.
- Involving children and young people in the evaluation is a function of good practice. It will help to ensure that consultative work with them can be improved and to determine the nature of the added value that children/young people can bring to public policy-making.
- The findings of the focus groups with children and young people suggest that evaluations involving them should occur, where possible, immediately after the consultation has taken place. Furthermore, where possible, the formats should be negotiated with the children and young people concerned since they are likely to have preferences as regards the use of a 'blank page' or a more directive approach.
- A monitoring, reporting and dissemination process should be established at national level to promote consultative work with children/young people by relevant organisations and to ensure that key lessons arising from such work are shared.

# Appendices

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## Appendix 1 – Documents relating to the Literature Review

### 1. Letter circulated via email to Children's Rights Alliance and NYCI member organisations

#### Request for information

re: consultation models to enable children and young people experiencing poverty and other forms of social exclusion to participate in public policy development

Dear Member,

The Children's Rights Alliance, in conjunction with the National Youth Council, is currently conducting a research study on behalf of the *Open Your Eyes to Child Poverty Initiative*.

The aim of the study is to establish principles and models of good practice for consultation with children and young people (up to 18 years) in relation to the formulation, design and implementation policies affecting them.

The study focuses in particular on consultation models for children and young people experiencing poverty or other forms of social exclusion and in relation to *public* policy.

An important dimension to our research is to establish past and present opportunities for disadvantaged children and young people to contribute to public policy formulation, design and implementation and the consultation models used to enable their participation. The research aims to identify opportunities and models:

- at local, regional and national level in Ireland;
- in European countries and at European level;
- in countries beyond Europe and at international level.

We would be most interested and grateful to receive information from you regarding experiences your organisation may have of consulting children and young people in relation to policy development and the models/methods used to consult with them.

These experiences may be, but need not be, with regard to public policy and children and young people experiencing poverty or other forms of social exclusion: details of any experience your organisation may have in this area of work and of the consultation mechanisms/models used would be most welcome as a source of valuable learning.

We would also be interested to receive names and contact details of other organisations that you may know to have experience of consulting children and young people in relation to policy development, in particular disadvantaged children and young people and in relation to public policy development.

Due to the limited timeframe for completion of this research study, we would be grateful if you could send information to us by **Friday, 31 August 2001**. If you are unable to send information by this date, please do so at your earliest convenience.

Information, including any printed documentation your organisation may have with regard to its work in this area, can be sent to Karen McAuley at the Children's Rights Alliance or Marian Brattman at the National Youth Council of Ireland (contact details above).

Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have any queries or would like further information regarding this study.

Yours sincerely,

Karen McAuley  
Children's Rights Alliance

Marian Brattman  
National Youth Council of Ireland

## 2. Letter sent via Email to National Children's Rights Coalitions and other relevant Organisations

### Request for information

Dear .....,

The Children's Rights Alliance is currently conducting a research study relating to the participation rights of children and young people in Ireland. The research is being undertaken in conjunction with the National Youth Council of Ireland and on behalf of a collaborative initiative called the *Open Your Eyes to Child Poverty Initiative*.

The aim of the research study is to establish principles and models of good practice for consulting children and young people (6-18 years) in relation to the formulation, design and implementation of policies that affect them. The study focuses in particular on consultation models for children and young people experiencing poverty or other forms of social exclusion and in relation to *public* policy development.

An important part of our research is to gather information about opportunities for disadvantaged children and young people to contribute to public policy development and about the consultation models/methods used to enable their participation. The research aims to identify opportunities and models of good practice:

- at local, regional and national level in Ireland;
- at local, regional and national level in other countries;
- at continental and international level.

We would be most interested and grateful to receive information from you regarding experiences your organisation or member organisations may have of consulting children and young people in relation to policy development and the models/methods used to consult with them.

These experiences may be, but need not be, with regard to public policy and children and young people experiencing poverty or other forms of social exclusion: details of any experiences your organisation or member organisations may have in this area of work and of the consultation models/mechanisms used would be most welcome as a source of valuable learning.

We would also be interested to receive the following from you:

- information about initiatives by the government of your country to consult children and young people in relation to public policy development at national, regional and/or local level;
- names and contact details of other statutory agencies or NGOs that you may know to have experience of consulting children and young people in relation to policy development, in particular disadvantaged children and young people and in relation to public policy development.

Due to the limited timeframe for completion of this research study, I would be grateful if you could send information, including any relevant printed documentation your organisation may have with regard to its work or the work of others in this area, to me at the Children's Rights Alliance by **Monday, 1 October 2001**.

Thank you very much indeed for your assistance in this matter.

Yours sincerely,

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Karen McAuley  
Children's Rights Alliance

## Appendix 2 – Documents relating to the Survey

### **1. Letter disseminated to Policy-Makers and Practitioners in December 2001 requesting completion of the attached Questionnaire.**

**National Youth Council of Ireland**  
Marian Brattman  
3 Montague Street  
Dublin 2  
Ireland  
Tel: +353 (0) 1 478 4122  
Fax: +353 (0) 1 478 3974  
Email: marian.brattman@nyci.ie

3rd December 2001

Re: Opportunities for and recommendations regarding consultation with children and young people experiencing poverty or other forms of social exclusion in relation to public policy development

Dear .....

Please find enclosed a questionnaire seeking information and recommendations from you regarding consultation by your organisation with children and young people experiencing poverty or other forms of social exclusion in relation to decision-making processes affecting them.

This questionnaire is part of a research study being conducted by the Children's Rights Alliance in conjunction with the National Youth Council of Ireland and on behalf of the *Open Your Eyes to Child Poverty Initiative*.

The aim of the study is to identify principles and methods of good practice for consulting children and young people (6-18 years) in relation to the formulation, design and implementation of policies affecting them. **Information received will inform a practical resource for policymakers and practitioners on principles and methods of good practice for consulting children/ young people in relation to public policy development.** The study focuses in particular on consultation models for children and young people experiencing poverty or other forms of social exclusion and in relation to *public* policy. There are several dimensions to this study, including: a literature review, a questionnaire for policymakers/practitioners, interviews with policymakers/practitioners and focus group consultations with children and young people.

An important dimension to this research is to gather information about opportunities in Ireland for socially excluded children and young people to contribute to public policy development and about the models/ methods used to enable them to be heard.

The aims of this questionnaire are:

- To gather information on past and present opportunities for consultation as described above;
- To ascertain the views of relevant policymakers and practitioners on current barriers to consultation with children and young people, in particular socially excluded children and young people;
- To receive recommendations from relevant policymakers and practitioners as to how opportunities for children and young people to participate in public policy development can be expanded, developed and progressed.

Please return your completed questionnaire to me at the National Youth Council of Ireland by **Monday, 21st January 2002.**

**If you are personally unable to complete the attached questionnaire, I would be grateful if you could distribute it to the person best placed within your organisation with responsibility for the**



identification, design, implementation and/or evaluation of policies relating to children and/or the person best placed within your organisation who works directly with children on a day-to-day basis.

I would also be grateful for any relevant supporting documentation regarding work that your organisation may have done in relation to consultation with children and young people.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any queries or would like further information about this research project.

Yours sincerely,

\_\_\_\_\_  
Marian Brattman  
National Youth Council of Ireland

## 2. Questionnaire disseminated to Policy-Makers and Practitioners



The aims of this questionnaire are to gather information and viewpoints on past and present opportunities for the involvement in decision-making and public policy development of children and young people, in particular those experiencing or at risk of poverty or other forms of social exclusion. All information provided by you will be treated in strictest confidence. Information received will inform a future resource by the *Open Your Eyes to Child Poverty Initiative* on principles and methods of good practice for consulting children and young people (6-18 years) in relation to public policy development. It will take 15-20 minutes to complete the questionnaire. Thank you for your support.

Form Number: \_\_\_\_\_

### Section I: Background Information

Name of organisation .....

Name and position of person completing questionnaire .....

.....

Telephone number ..... Email.....

### Section II: General Information

1. Does the organisation consult with children/young people?

☐ Yes

*go to Q.3*

☐ No

*go to Q.2*

2. **If no to Q. 1**, please specify the reasons why the organisation does not currently consult with children/young people? **Please tick the most appropriate boxes.** *go to Section V*

- ☐ Not part of the organisation's remit
- ☐ No structures or guidelines in place to facilitate consultation
- ☐ No resources (personnel, funding etc.) available to facilitate consultation
- ☐ Personnel not trained to consult with children/young people
- ☐ Children/young people do not have the skills needed for decision-making / policy-making
- ☐ Children/young people do not want to be consulted
- ☐ Past experience has shown that no real benefits accrue from consulting children/young people
- ☐ Other (please specify)

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3. **If yes to Q. 1**, what age group(s) does the organisation most often consult with? **Please tick the most appropriate box(es).**

- ☐ 6-8 years
- ☐ 9-11 years
- ☐ 12-14 years
- ☐ 15-18 years

4. How often does the organisation consult children/ young people in relation to decision-making?

- ☐ It is part of our everyday work
- ☐ At least once every two months
- ☐ Routinely, as required
- ☐ In the past, but not currently
- ☐ Only once, not to be repeated
- ☐ Other (please specify) .....
- .....
- .....

5. Please specify which, if any, of the following groups of children/ young people the organisation has consulted in the past or currently consults. **Please tick all applicable boxes.**

- ☐ Children /young people experiencing or at risk of poverty/socio-economic disadvantage
- ☐ Children/ young people belonging to the Traveller community
- ☐ Children/ young people with disabilities
- ☐ Children/ young people who are out of home
- ☐ Children/ young people with literacy difficulties
- ☐ Children from cultural/ ethnic minorities
- ☐ Other (please specify) .....

6. Please rank how often the organisation consults with children/ young people in relation to the different levels of organisational decision-making listed below, where 1= most often, 2= often, 3= sometimes, 4= not often and 5= never.

- ☐ **Operational:** Decision-making with respect to the day to day provision of activities and services for children/young people by the organisation 1 2 3 4 5
- ☐ **Managerial:** Decision-making regarding overall management of the organisation, including allocation of resources, planning and evaluation 1 2 3 4 5
- ☐ **Political:** Decision-making by the organisation relating to the public policy arena 1 2 3 4 5
- ☐ **Financial:** Decision-making relating to fundraising activities or other aspects of the organisation's financial activities 1 2 3 4 5
- ☐ Other (please specify)

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### Section III: Settings and Methodologies

7. Please specify what settings and methods/activities the organisation has used or currently uses to consult children/young people and indicate whether these methods and activities have proven to be effective or ineffective. **Please tick all appropriate box(es).**

<u>Settings</u>	<u>Effective</u>	<u>Ineffective</u>
<input type="checkbox"/> Online	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> Children's/youth fora or conferences	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> Committee meetings	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> Activity-based workshops	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify) .....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<u>Methods/Activities</u>		
<input type="checkbox"/> Focus group discussion	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> Survey	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> Individual interviews	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> Use of the writing (letters, stories, poems, etc.)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> Use of visual arts	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> Use of drama / simulations	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> Use of music/singing	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> Use of games	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> Use of email/Internet	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

<input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify) .....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**Section IV: Evaluation**

8. Has the organisation evaluated the involvement of children/ young people in its decision-making/policy-making?

- ☐ Yes *go to Q.9*
- ☐ Not yet, but planned *go to Q. 10*

9. If yes to Q. 8, who played/plays a *key* role in this evaluation? **Please tick the most appropriate box.**

- ☐ Staff member
- ☐ Participating children/young people
- ☐ Independent consultant
- ☐ Government Department
- ☐ Voluntary Youth Leader
- ☐ Other (please specify) .....

10. Please indicate the extent to which consulting children/young people has proven to be beneficial to the children/young people concerned, the project/process in question and/or the decision-making/policy-making of the organisation.

	Extremely beneficial	Quite beneficial	Unbeneficial
Children/young people	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Project/process	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Organisational decision-making /policy making	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Please add any additional comments on the organisation's experiences of evaluating the project/process, including comments on the benefits of consulting with children/ young people to the organisation and/or the impact it has had on organisational decision-making/policy-making.

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## Section V: Attitudes and Recommendations

11. Regardless of whether or not the organisation has experience in this area, do you believe that children/young people should be consulted in relation to decision-making/policy-making that affects them?

☐ Yes

*go to Q.12*

☐ No

*go to Q.13*

12. **If yes to Q.11**, please examine the statements below which present possible reasons for involving children/young people in decision-making/policy-making that affects them. Please circle the response that indicates whether you believe the reason to be very significant or not significant, where 1= very significant, 2 = significant, 3 = not significant, if you are unsure, please circle 4. *go to Q.14.*

☐ Children/young people have a right to be consulted with respect to policies/issues affecting them.

1 2 3 4

☐ Children/young people have insights and perspectives to offer that are different from adults'.

1 2 3 4

☐ Consulting children/young people leads to better decision making, including decision-making relating to public policy developments relevant to children/young people.

1 2 3 4

☐ The experience of consultation is a source of valuable learning for children/young people.

1 2 3 4

☐ Children/ young people engage more with services if they are consulted

1 2 3 4

☐ Legislation or other kind of provision requires the organisation to consult with children/ young people

1 2 3 4

☐ Other (please specify)

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13. **If no to Q.11**, please examine the statements below, which present possible reasons why the organisation **may not** involve children/ young people in decision-making/ policy-making that affects them. Please circle the response that indicates whether you believe the reason to be very significant or not significant, where 1= very significant, 2 = significant, 3 = not significant, if you are unsure, please circle 4. *go to Q.14*

<input type="checkbox"/> Children/young people do not have the necessary knowledge, skills and/or experience.	1	2	3	4
<input type="checkbox"/> Children/young people should enjoy their childhood/youth free of such responsibilities.	1	2	3	4
<input type="checkbox"/> Children/young people have nothing new to bring to existing decision-making/policy-making.	1	2	3	4
<input type="checkbox"/> While there are potential benefits, these are not sufficient to justify the time, resources, training and modifications to existing structures required to facilitate meaningful consultation with children/young people.	1	2	3	4
<input type="checkbox"/> No legislation or other kind of provision requires the organisation to consult with children/ young people	1	2	3	4
<input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify)				
<hr/>				
<hr/>				
<hr/>				
<hr/>				
<hr/>				

14. Please examine the statements below, which name possible barriers to consulting with children/ young people in relation to public policy development at the present time. Please indicate whether you believe the barrier named to be very significant, significant or insignificant, where 1= very significant, 2 = significant, 3 = not significant, if you are unsure, please circle 4.

<input type="checkbox"/> Existing decision-making structures are not flexible enough to accommodate consultation with children/young people	1	2	3	4
<input type="checkbox"/> Lack of resources (e.g. funding, personnel etc.) and time to devise, implement and evaluate consultation with children/young people in relation to public policy development	1	2	3	4
<input type="checkbox"/> Unavailability of training courses and resource materials to enable staff to consult with children/young people effectively	1	2	3	4
<input type="checkbox"/> Lack of supports for children/young people	1	2	3	4
<input type="checkbox"/> Lack of interest on the part of children/young people to become involved in public policy development	1	2	3	4
<input type="checkbox"/> Adults do not think that children/ young people can make a meaningful contribution to public policy development	1	2	3	4
<input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify)				
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15. In your view, how do you think these or other barriers might be overcome?

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16. What, in your view, are the principal measures needed to develop the number and quality of opportunities for children/young people, particularly those experiencing or at risk of poverty or other forms of social exclusion, to be consulted with respect to decision-making/ public policy development affecting them?

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17. Please list any sources of funding that the organisation receives or has received to facilitate meaningful consultation with children/ young people in decision-making/ policy-making that affects them.

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Thank you for completing this questionnaire. Please return it to me in the stamped addressed envelope provided by January 21<sup>st</sup> 2002. I would be grateful if you could send me any background information on your organisation as well as copies of any evaluations, reports, or guidelines that your organisation may have produced in relation to consulting children/ young people in relation to public policy development.

**Marian Brattman.**  
**National Youth Council of Ireland**



## Appendix 3 – Documents relating to the Interviews

### **1. Letter sent to Policy-Makers and Practitioners following their agreement by telephone to be interviewed.**

<div style="text-align: right;"><b>Children's Rights Alliance</b> 13 Harcourt Street Dublin 2  Tel: (01) 405 4823 Fax: (01) 405 4826 Email: <a href="mailto:karen@cra.iol.ie">karen@cra.iol.ie</a></div> <p>Dear .....</p> <p>Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed as part of the research study on consulting children and young people that is currently being conducted by the Children's Rights Alliance and the National Youth Council of Ireland on behalf of the <i>Open Your Eyes to Child Poverty Initiative</i>.</p> <p>I am writing to confirm that my interview with you will take place at ..... on ..... from ..... to ..... .</p> <p>Enclosed with this letter is the list of questions that I will be asking all interviewees. To facilitate best use of the time available for the interview, I would be grateful if you could reflect on these questions prior to the interview. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you require clarification on any of the questions in advance of the interview.</p> <p>You can be assured that all information provided by you during the course of the interview will be treated in the strictest confidence. In this regard, I would appreciate if you would consider how you would like your responses to be attributed in publications arising from this research study.</p> <p>If you wish to discuss any aspect of the interview or the research study, please contact me at the above telephone number.</p> <p>Yours sincerely,</p> <p>_____ Karen McAuley Children's Rights Alliance</p>
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## **Appendix 4 - Documents relating to Focus Groups with Children and Young People**

### **1. Template of Letter and Consent Form sent to Parents/Guardians.**

Unless the researcher was advised otherwise by an assisting organisation, these documents were accompanied by a brief description of the research project as well as of the Children's Rights Alliance, the National Youth Council of Ireland and the 'Open Your Eyes to Child Poverty Initiative'.

**Children's Rights Alliance**

13 Harcourt Street

Dublin 2

Tel: 01 405 4823

Fax: 01 405 4826

Email: karen@cra.iol.ie

Dear Parent or Guardian,

I am writing to you to request your permission for your child to participate in a workshop to be held at ..... on ..... from ..... to .....

The workshop is one of several workshops planned with children and young people. The aim of these workshops is to enable children and young people to contribute their ideas to a research project on good practice for consulting children and young people when policies are being developed that affect them. The research is being carried out by the Children's Rights Alliance in conjunction with the National Youth Council of Ireland and on behalf of the Open Your Eyes to Child Poverty Initiative. Information about the project and the organisations involved is enclosed to assist you in making a decision about your child's participation in the workshop.

The workshop has been planned with the assistance of ..... I will be conducting the workshop with ..... Like ....., I have experience of working with and consulting children and young people. You can also be assured that the workshop will aim to reflect good practice - for example, the voluntary nature of the young people's participation will be respected and their views and ideas will be treated with respect and in confidence.

I would be very grateful if you would consider giving permission for your child to participate in the workshop. If you are willing to give consent for your child to participate, please complete the enclosed consent form and give it to your child to bring with him/her to the workshop.

If you have any queries or would like further information about the workshop and the research project, please feel free to contact ..... or me at the Children's Rights Alliance (telephone number above).

Thank you very much for your help.

Kind regards,

Karen McAuley

### Consent Form for Parents/Guardians

Please complete this consent form and ensure that your child brings it with him/her to the workshop.

THANK YOU

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I consent / do not consent (*delete as appropriate*) for ..... (*young person's name*) to participate in the workshop 'Hearing Children's and Young People's Voices' at ..... on ..... from ..... to .....

Name: .....

Signature: .....

Date: .....

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Please feel free to state the reasons why you wish or do not wish to grant consent.

Please return your completed form to:

## 2. Template Letter and Consent Form for Children

**Children's Rights Alliance**  
13 Harcourt Street  
Dublin 2

**Please show this letter to your parents or guardians**

Dear.....

My name is Karen. I am writing to invite you to a 'workshop' at .....in ..... on ..... from ..... to .....

A workshop is when people meet to talk about what they think about something – an idea or a plan or an event. In a workshop, people often say what they think by talking. Or they may say what they think in other ways - like writing or drawing or making something or doing drama.

The workshop I am doing is called 'Hearing Children's and Young People's Voices'. It's about finding out if children would like to have a say when plans are being made for them – like a plan for a new playground where they live. And it's about finding out what children think are the best ways for them to share their ideas.

I would like to know what you think are the best ways. I hope you will come to the workshop to tell me your ideas - your ideas will help me a lot to think about good ways for hearing children's voices.

I am planning the workshop with ..... We will do our best to make sure that the workshop is interesting and some fun too. I will be there. And ..... will be there too.

If you would like to come and help, please fill out the form that comes with this letter. Please make sure you fill out the form with your parents or guardians. When you have filled out the form, please give it back to .....

..... knows all about the workshop. So please ask him if you have any questions.

I hope I will see you at the workshop. **THANK YOU** for your help.

Karen McAuley

**'Hearing Children's and Young People's Voices'  
Children's Workshop**

**Consent Form for Children**

Please fill out this form with your parents or guardians. When you have filled it out, please give it back to ..... at.....

THANK YOU.

My name is ..... and I would like to come to the workshop 'Hearing Children's and Young People's Voices' at ..... in ..... on ..... from ..... to.....

My Mum, Dad or Guardian has signed his/her name here: .....  
The date today is .....

### 3. Template Letter and Consent Form for Young People

Children's Rights Alliance  
13 Harcourt Street  
Dublin 2

Please show this letter to your Parents or Guardians

Dear .....

Hello! My name's Karen and I'd like to invite you to participate in a workshop at ..... on ..... from ..... to .....

The workshop is called 'Hearing Children's and Young People's Voices'. It's part of a project that the Children's Rights Alliance and the National Youth Council of Ireland. The aim of this project is to find out and let other people know about good ways to consult children and young people when plans are being developed that will affect children and young people.

I'd like to know whether you think it's important to consult children and young people and what you think are the best ways of going about asking children and young people for their views. And so I hope you will come to the workshop on .....

As you may already know, I am planning the workshop with ..... Together, we'll do our best to make sure the workshop is interesting. I'll be there and I hope that ..... and ..... will be too.

If you would like to come and help, please fill out the form that comes with this letter. Please ask your parents or guardians to sign it too. Please bring your completed consent form to the workshop.

If you would like more information about the workshop to help you decide whether to take part, please ask .....

I hope to see you next Monday. THANK YOU for your help,

Karen McAuley

Hearing Children's and Young People's Voices' – Young People's Workshop

#### Consent Form for Young People

Please fill out this form and bring it with you to the workshop on Monday.

THANK YOU.

My name is ..... and I am willing to take part in the workshop 'Hearing Children's and Young People's Voices' that will be held at ..... on ..... from ..... to .....

My signature: .....

The signature of my Mum, Dad or Guardian: .....

Today's date is: .....

#### 4. Questions asked of Children and Young People who participated in the Focus Groups

##### **Views on having a say**

- Do you think that children and young people should have a say when plans are being made that affect them?
- Do you think that children's and young people's views should be given a) more weight than those of adults, b) the same weight as those of adults or c) less weight than those of adults?
- Why do you think this?

##### **Making Contact**

- Where are good places for people to contact you if they would like to consult you?
- Does it matter whether you are invited to participate as an individual or as part of a group?

##### **Consent**

- Is it important to you to have the choice of participating in something like this?
- Do you think it's important to get permission from the parents/guardians of children and young people?
- Does it make a difference to you that your parents/guardians have said it's ok for you to be here today?

##### **Confidentiality**

- Do you think that information provided by children and young people should be treated in confidence?
- Do you mind that your individual names won't be included in anything we publish in relation to this project?

##### **Transparency/Information**

- Is it important that you are given information about the event or project you are being asked to participate in?

##### **Where?**

- Does it matter whether or not someone who would like to hear what you think about things meets with you in person?
- Does it matter whether or not the place you are meeting is familiar to you?
- Where are good places for someone to meet with you or other young people to find out what you think about things?
- Is there a best place? If there is a best place, where is it?
- Can you think of words to describe what a place that you would like to meet to say what you think about things looks and feels like?

##### **When?**

- When is a good time for someone to meet with you to do something like this?

##### **Who?**

- Does it matter whether or not you know the person who is asking you for your views and ideas?
- Are you glad that someone you know and trust is here today to give us a hand?
- The kind of person I am happy to share my views and ideas with is someone who ...

##### **How?**

- I enjoy *and* am good at expressing my opinions and ideas in these ways ....

- Does it matter to you whether doing something like this is fun?
- What helps to make something like this enjoyable?

#### Evaluation

- Does it matter whether or not you are given a chance to say what you thought of a consultation you have participated in?
- When is a good time to say what you think – for example, during a consultation, immediately after, some time soon after?
- What are good ways for you to be able to say what you think about a consultation you have participated in?

#### Feedback

- Is it important to give children and young people who have contributed their ideas to an event, plan or project information on, for example how their ideas will be used or how a project they have contributed to is developing?
- Is there anything in particular that you would like to get “feedback” on?
- In what ways would you like to receive “feedback”?

#### Wrapping Up

- Anything else to add?

## 5. Evaluations of the Focus Groups by Participants

Individual evaluation forms were prepared and disseminated to participants at the end of each consultative session. The evaluation form comprised twelve questions. Participants were requested to indicate whether a given aspect of the pilot consultation was ‘good’, ‘ok’ or ‘not good’. Participants were also encouraged to make any additional comments or suggestions in the space provided at the end of the form. The evaluations of those individuals/groups who completed the evaluation forms are presented below.

### FOCUS GROUP 1

What did you think of ...	Good	OK	Not Good
1. ... the invitation you received?	5	0	0
2. ... the idea of asking <i>you</i> to fill out a consent form?	4	1	0
3. ... the amount of information you were given about this consultation and the project it's part of?	5	0	0
4. ... the meeting place?	5	0	0
5. ... the amount of time you had to tell us your views and ideas?	4	1	0
6. ... the number of breaks?	2	1	1
7. ... the food and drinks?	3	1	0
8. ... the person who came to listen to your views and ideas?	5	0	0
9. ... having people you knew around to help out?	5	0	0
10. ... the ways you were asked to express your views and ideas:			
a) small group discussion with flipchart?	5	0	
b) individual booklets?	4	1	
c) Grafitti wall in different rooms?	5	0	
11. ... the questions you were asked?	5	0	0
12. ... this feedback form?	4	1	0

### Comments and Suggestions

- “I thought that today was brilliant”
- “I really feel I can trust you and today was great and fun and I hope everyone else feels the same”
- “It was brilliant and cool and I enjoyed it a lot. It was great and hope I see you soon”
- “No suggestions. Thanx for coming.”

## FOCUS GROUP 2

One participant did not complete an evaluation form. Another responded to 2 of the 12 questions only.

What did you think of ...	Good	OK	Not Good
1. ... the invitation you received?	4	0	0
2. ... the idea of asking <i>you</i> to fill out a consent form?	2	2	0
3. ... the amount of information you were given about this consultation and the project it's part of?	4	0	0
4. ... the meeting place?	4	0	0
5. ... the amount of time you had to tell us your views and ideas?	1	4	0
6. ... the number of breaks?	3	1	1
7. ... the food and drinks?	3	1	0
8. ... the person who came to listen to your views and ideas?	3	1	0
9. ... having people you knew around to help out?	3	1	0
10. ... the ways you were asked to express your views and ideas:			
a) small group discussion with flipchart?	3	1	0
b) individual booklets?	3	1	0
c) Writing or drawing on the graffiti wall?	3	0	1
11. ... the questions you were asked?	2	1	1
12. ... this feedback form?	4	0	0

### Comments and Suggestions

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "More time to do the workshop. More time in playground."</li> <li>• "The afternoon was very good. Thank you."</li> <li>• "I think it was deadly today".</li> </ul>
---

## FOCUS GROUP 3

One participant did not complete an evaluation form while another did complete questions 10(a) and 10(b).

What did you think of ...	Good	OK	Not Good
1. ... the invitation you received?	4	01	0
2. ... the idea of asking <i>you</i> to fill out a consent form?	4	1	0
3. ... the amount of information you were given about this consultation and the project it's part of?	3	2	0
4. ... the meeting place?	4 (1)	0 (1)*	0
5. ... the amount of time you had to tell us your views and ideas?	2	3	0
6. ... the number of breaks?	1	4	0
7. ... the food and drinks?	2	1	2
8. ... the person who came to listen to your views and ideas?	5	0	0
9. ... having people you knew around to help out?	4	0	1
10. ... the ways you were asked to express your views and ideas:			
a) small group discussion with flipchart?	3	1	0
b) individual booklets?	4	0	0
c) Writing or drawing on the graffiti wall?	4	1	0
11. ... the questions you were asked?	5	0	0
12. ... this feedback form?	4	1	0

\* One participant's view was that the venue was somewhere between 'good' and 'ok'.

### Comments and Suggestions

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "It was good you had a chance to express your views"</li> </ul>
--



## FOCUS GROUP 4

Evaluation forms were completed by 5 of the 8 participants.

What did you think of ...	Good	OK	Not Good
1. ... the invitation you received?	4	1	0
2. ... the idea of asking <i>you</i> to fill out a consent form?	4	1	0
3. ... the amount of information you were given about this consultation and the project it's part of?	3	2	0
4. ... the meeting place?	5	0	0
5. ... the amount of time you had to tell us your views and ideas?	4	1	0
6. ... the number of breaks?	4	1	0
7. ... the food and drinks?	5	0	0
8. ... the person who came to listen to your views and ideas?	5	0	0
9. ... having people you knew around to help out?	5	0	0
10. ... the ways you were asked to express your views and ideas:			
a) small group discussion with flipchart?	4	1	0
b) individual booklets?	4	1	0
c) Writing or drawing on the graffiti wall?	5	0	0
11. ... the questions you were asked?	5	0	0
12. ... this feedback form?	5	0	0

### Comments and Suggestions

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Invitation – “Make it more interesting”</li> <li>• Time – “weekends”</li> <li>• Breaks – “Two breaks every two hours”</li> <li>• Talking in a group – Ok with “people who stay quiet”</li> <li>• “it was excellent”</li> </ul>
---

## FOCUS GROUP 5

2 participants did not respond to question 3. One participant did not respond to question 8.

What did you think of ...	Good	OK	Not Good
1. ... the invitation you received?	4	1	0
2. ... the idea of asking <i>you</i> to fill out a consent form?	4	1	0
3. ... the amount of information you were given about this consultation and the project it's part of?	1	1	1
4. ... the meeting place?	5	0	0
5. ... the amount of time you had to tell us your views and ideas?	2	2	1
6. ... the number of breaks?	4	0	1
7. ... the food and drinks?	5	0	0
8. ... the person who came to listen to your views and ideas?	4*	0	0
9. ... having people you knew around to help out?	4	1	0
10. ... the ways you were asked to express your views and ideas:			
a) small group discussion with flipchart?	3	0	2
b) individual booklets?	4	1	0
c) Writing or drawing on the graffiti wall?	2	2	1
11. ... the questions you were asked?	3	1	1
12. ... this feedback form?	3**	2	0

\* In relation to this question, two participants responded with “very good”.

\*\* In relation to this question, one participant responded with “very good”.

### Comments and Suggestions

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “it was good”</li> <li>• “it was fun”</li> <li>• “it was o.k., a bit boring”</li> <li>• “I liked it very much”</li> <li>• Ask “short questions”</li> <li>• Should be / needs to be “2 or 3 hours longer”</li> </ul>
--

## FOCUS GROUP 6

One participant did not complete questions 6 or 10(a).

What did you think of ...	Good	OK	Not Good
1. ... the invitation you received?	2	2*	0
2. ... the idea of asking <i>you</i> to fill out a consent form?	4	0	0
3. ... the amount of information you were given about this consultation and the project it's part of?	4	0	0
4. ... the meeting place?	4	0	0
5. ... the amount of time you had to tell us your views and ideas?	3	1	0
6. ... the number of breaks?	3	0	0
7. ... the food and drinks?	4	0	0
8. ... the person who came to listen to your views and ideas?	4	0	0
9. ... having people you knew around to help out?	4	0	0
10. ... the ways you were asked to express your views and ideas:			
a) small group discussion with flipchart?	3	0	0
b) individual booklets?	4	0	0
c) Writing or drawing on the graffiti wall?	4	0	0
11. ... the questions you were asked?	4	0	0
12. ... this feedback form?	3	1	0

\* In saying that the invitation was 'ok', one participant suggested that the invitations were "too long".

### Comments and Suggestions

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>"I enjoyed this. I thought it was good and interesting"</li> </ul>
---

## FOCUS GROUP 7

One participant did not answer question 3 or question 10 (a), (b) and (c).

What did you think of ...	Good	OK	Not Good
1. ... the invitation you received?	6	0	0
2. ... the idea of asking <i>you</i> to fill out a consent form?	4	2	0
3. ... the amount of information you were given about this consultation and the project it's part of?	3	2	0
4. ... the meeting place?	6	0	0
5. ... the amount of time you had to tell us your views and ideas?	3	3	0
6. ... the number of breaks?	6	1	0
7. ... the food and drinks?	6	0	0
8. ... the person who came to listen to your views and ideas?	6	0	0
9. ... having people you knew around to help out?	5	1	0
10. ... the ways you were asked to express your views and ideas:			
a) small group discussion with flipchart?	4	1	0
b) individual booklets?	3	2	0
c) Writing or drawing on the graffiti wall?	2	2	1
11. ... the questions you were asked?	6	0	0
12. ... this feedback form?	5	1	0

### Comments and Suggestions

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>"I liked it because we were asked important Q and we had lots of fun"</li> <li>"What I thought of ... it was very interesting and I enjoyed myself on the break. And I hope I come back in the future"</li> <li>"I think the evening went well, I enjoyed myself and felt important because I was asked my opinion and I was being listened to which if you're a teenager that very seldom happens"</li> <li>"I think that we should give our own opinions and that we should be allowed to say it out to everybody and I always wanted to be a singer but I can't get no chances. Thank you for today - it was brilliant"</li> <li>"I liked the day out and like how long we had to do it. The same as this but more time than this and in the day"</li> </ul>
--

- “It was all interesting and everyone’s points were taken”

## FOCUS GROUP 8

No completed evaluation forms were received from participants in this consultation, but the following comments are recorded on the tape and arise from the questions around evaluation that were among those asked of participants:

- “Too many people laughing and making smart comments ... This is good, like ... just to be getting listened to, getting your ideas listened to ... That’s the best thing”.
- “There should be more music sessions as well. Because I never went to music sessions”

## FOCUS GROUP 9

Three participants did not complete question 10. One participant did not complete 10(b). Responses to question 10(c) are being discounted because this method was not used during this consultation.

What did you think of ...	Good	OK	Not Good
1. ... the invitation you received?	10	2	0
2. ... the idea of asking <i>you</i> to fill out a consent form?	7	3	2
3. ... the amount of information you were given about this consultation and the project it’s part of?	9	3	0
4. ... the meeting place?	9	3	0
5. ... the amount of time you had to tell us your views and ideas?	4	7	1
6. ... the number of breaks?	6	5	1
7. ... the food and drinks?	11	1	0
8. ... the person who came to listen to your views and ideas?	12	0	0
9. ... having people you knew around to help out?	9	3	0
10. ... the ways you were asked to express your views and ideas:			
a) small group discussion with flipchart?	8	0	1
b) individual booklets?	3	4	1
c) Writing or drawing on the graffiti wall? NA	NA	NA	NA
11. ... the questions you were asked?	11	1	0
12. ... this feedback form?	8	4	0

### Comments and Suggestions

- “Very interesting and enjoyable. It’s good to hear everyone’s opinions. Thanks!”
- “I thought that it was very interesting and I would like to have the final report”
- “Very good, interesting. It is nice to have the opportunity to voice your opinions as young people’s opinions are rarely heard”

## FOCUS GROUP 10

Three participants returned completed evaluation forms subsequent to the consultation. One participant did not respond to question 10(a).

What did you think of ...	Good	OK	Not Good
1. ... the invitation you received?	1	2	0
2. ... the idea of asking <i>you</i> to fill out a consent form?	1x v.g 1.	1	0
3. ... the amount of information you were given about this consultation and the project it’s part of?	1	1	1
4. ... the meeting place?	1x v.g 2.	0	0
5. ... the amount of time you had to tell us your views and ideas?	1	1	0
6. ... the number of breaks?	0	3	0
7. ... the food and drinks?	3	0	0
8. ... the person who came to listen to your views and ideas?	3	0	0
9. ... having people you knew around to help out?	1	2	0

10. ... the ways you were asked to express your views and ideas:			
a) small group discussion with flipchart?	1	1	0
b) individual booklets? NA	NA	NA	NA
c) Writing or drawing on the graffiti wall?	1	2	0
11. ... the questions you were asked?	0	3	0
12. ... this feedback form?	1	2	0

#### Comments and Suggestions

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "You should have had more time. Longer breaks. More info before you come."</li> <li>• "Make writing bigger to make it easier to read"</li> </ul>
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- Children's Law Centre, Belfast - [www.childrenslawcentre.org/commin.htm](http://www.childrenslawcentre.org/commin.htm)
- Children's Law Centre, Belfast - [www.childrenslawcentre.org/bill.htm](http://www.childrenslawcentre.org/bill.htm)
- Commission for Children and Young People, New South Wales - [www.kids.nsw.gov.au](http://www.kids.nsw.gov.au)
- Department of Education and Science [www.youthinformation.ie](http://www.youthinformation.ie)
- Human Rights Unit, Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister in Northern Ireland - [www.allchildrenni.com](http://www.allchildrenni.com)
- International Children's Conference on the Environment - [www.icccanada2002.org](http://www.icccanada2002.org)
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- Northern Ireland Office of Law Reform - [www.olrni.gov.uk/youngpeople](http://www.olrni.gov.uk/youngpeople)
- Scottish Executive Youth Summit - [www.scotland.gov.uk](http://www.scotland.gov.uk) or [www.youthsummit.org.uk](http://www.youthsummit.org.uk)
- UNICEF - [www.unicef.org/youth](http://www.unicef.org/youth)
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