AN AUDIT OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S PARTICIPATION IN DECISION-MAKING

2011

This report is an audit of children and young people's participation in decision-making in the statutory and non-statutory sectors.

CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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She has written a number of other reports for the DCYA, including:
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- ✓ *Report of the Public Consultation for the Development of the National Recreation Policy for Young People* (2006).

She has also conducted research on behalf of the National Youth Arts Programme, Kilbarrack Youth Project, Dun Laoghaire VEC, Sligo VEC, Southside Partnership, Dun Laoghaire–Rathdown Anti-Racism and Diversity Steering Committee, Limerick Regeneration Agencies, the Adult Community Education Network, COPE Homeless Agency, Fundamental Rights of Irregular Migrants (FRIM) and Instituto Degli Innocenti for the European Parliament.

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- ✓ *Listen to Our Voices: Hearing Children and Young People in the care of the State* (2011);
- ✓ *Teenage Mental Health: What helps and what hurts?* (2009);
- ✓ *Report on Teenagers' views on solutions to Alcohol Misuse* (2007);
- ✓ Youth-friendly versions of *Teenspace: The National Recreation Policy for Young People* (2007);
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This aim of this study was to audit children and young people's participation in decision-making activity in both statutory and non-statutory organisations working with children and young people aged 18 years and under. Four separate online surveys were developed as part of the research process. The first was aimed at Comhairle na nÓg and other organisations that work with or on behalf of children and young people, the second at the HSE and HSE-funded services, the third at young people on Student Councils and the fourth at Student Council Liaison Teachers.

Overall, organisations, services and structures that have involved children and young people in decision-making activity generally reported positive experiences, benefits and outcomes with regard to such activity. However, levels of participation activity and effectiveness varied among respondents. There was a much higher rate of participation activity among children and young people involved in Comhairle na nÓg and other organisations compared with the HSE and HSE-funded services. Four out of 5 respondents (80.3%) from Comhairle na nÓg and other organisations are currently involving children and young people in decision-making and 8.5% have done so in the past, whereas 36.2% of respondents from the HSE and HSE-funded services are currently involving children and young people in decision-making and 19.9% have done so in the past.

Involvement in decision-making was typically described as informal among those from the HSE and HSE-funded services. On the other hand, involvement of children and young people in decision-making within Student Councils, Comhairle na nÓg and other organisations was more structured. The majority of Student Councils are well established and involve young people in decision-making activities on a regular basis. For example, over 8 out of 10 Student Councils (81%) had been in existence for 5 or more years and almost all (93%) meet at least once a month and over half meet more than once a month. Comhairle na nÓg and other organisations reported correspondingly high levels (93.5%) of ongoing involvement in participation activity, with over half (52.3%) having permanent youth councils or forums. Respondents from Comhairle na nÓg, other organisations, the HSE and HSE-funded services all reported an increase in participation activity in the last 3 years.

The key issues that children and young people who are involved in decision-making are consulted about varied, although mental health was cited as one of the most common topics. The HSE and HSE-funded services were most likely to consult with children and young people on mental health issues, whereas Comhairle na nÓg and other organisations were most likely to consult with children and young people on issues relating to youth services, leisure and recreation, followed by mental health issues. Young people on Student Councils were most likely to be consulted by school management in relation to the development of new or existing school rules and policies.

In terms of the impact of participation activity, all organisations and structures stated that the greatest impact related to influencing decisions that affect children and young people directly as individuals, such as healthcare and family issues. However, children and young people were more likely to have an impact on the development of policies, rules, services (such as facilities for young people and youth cafés) and programmes as a result of participation in decision-making within Student Councils, Comhairle na nÓg and other organisations than in HSE and HSE-funded organisations.

Involvement of children and young people in participation activity was considered to have the greatest impact at a local level by the HSE and HSE-funded services, as well as by Comhairle na nÓg and other organisations. However, respondents from Comhairle na nÓg and other organisations felt children and young people were having a stronger impact as a result of their involvement in decision-making at organisational and national levels compared with respondents from the HSE and HSE-funded services.

The impact of participation in decision-making structures was measured from the perspective of children and young people in the Student Council survey. The majority of Student Council members (75%) felt they were having a 'medium' impact in their school. While large numbers of Student Councils were consulted by school management in relation to school rules and policies, there was a shortfall in relation to their overall impact on decision-making in these areas. For example, 78% of Student Councils were consulted by their school management regarding school rules and 62% had been responsible for changes in schools rules. Similarly, 87% of Student Councils were consulted on school policies, but 73% had been responsible for policy changes.

Young Travellers, early school-leavers and children and young people from ethnic minorities were considered by the HSE, HSE-funded services, Comhairle na nÓg and other organisations to be the hardest groups to reach in terms of involvement in participation activity. All organisations also reported minimal, if any, participation of young people under the age of 12. Challenges in relation to the representation of children and young people from all backgrounds on decision-making structures and preventing personal motivations for representation was a common emerging theme. For example, respondents from Comhairle na nÓg and other organisations reported difficulties pertaining to the over-representation of children and young people from the middle classes on participation structures.

Young people involved in Student Councils identified the key benefits of participation in these structures as personal benefits to them as individuals. The survey also found that Student Council members considered their main achievements to be the development of their own leadership and communication skills, as well as increased responsibility. While the majority of Student Council members agreed that making sure students have a say was their main role, only 60% said they always consulted with the student body as a whole in relation to important issues. Furthermore, the survey

found that the least positive relationship experienced by members of Student Councils was with other students in their schools.

For the most part, respondents from Comhairle na nÓg had higher levels of resources devoted to participation activity, such as dedicated staff, training and premises, compared with those working in the HSE and HSE-funded services. For example, three-quarters of respondents from Comhairle na nÓg and other organisations that involve children and young people in decision-making had staff time specifically allocated to these activities (compared with 48.3% from the HSE) and 71.4% of respondents from Comhairle na nÓg and other organisations had dedicated premises (compared with 27.5% of those from the HSE). While just 4.8% of those who responded from Comhairle na nÓg and other organisations stated that they had no resources specifically allocated to children and young people, 44.2% of those who responded from the HSE and HSE-funded services made similar claims.

Student Councils also identified the need for additional resources and supports, such as Student Council networks, forums and unions. Although Student Council members called for more resources, just over two-thirds of respondents (67.5%) had never used the Student Council Diary, which is distributed to all schools to assist in planning and organising their activities. Similarly, some 42% of Student Council Liaison Teachers had never used the CSPE Resource Pack *Student Councils in Schools*. Underuse of resource material was also reported in the survey of the HSE and HSE-funded services: only 15.8% of respondents had ever used the HSE *National Strategy for Service User Involvement in the Irish Health Service, 2008-2013* to help them involve children and young people in decision-making and only 56.9% had ever received the HSE *Guidelines on Working with Children*.

As regards perceptions and attitudes towards involving children and young people in participation activity, the majority of respondents from the HSE and HSE-funded services and Comhairle na nÓg and other organisations 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' that children and young people have a right to be involved in public decision-making. However, higher percentages of respondents from Comhairle na nÓg and other organisations (93.5%) valued the right of children and young people to be involved in decision-making compared with those from the HSE and HSE-funded services (73.8%). The point was also raised that while significant work has been done at Government level with regard to children and young people's participation, the formal inclusion of children's rights in the Irish Constitution was needed.

In the case of Student Councils, 57% felt their views were 'always' taken seriously by school management, but 43% felt their views were only 'sometimes' or 'rarely' taken seriously. Furthermore, only 9% of Student Councils were 'always' involved in decision-making with school management in their school, whereas the majority (68%) were 'sometimes' involved in decision-making. Nonetheless, the act of school management listening to Student Councils' ideas, whether they were taken on board or not, was considered to be a key indicator of respect and very important to young people in terms of participation activity.

INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND

Goal 1 of the National Children's Strategy (2000) states that *'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*'. The Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA) has the lead role under the National Children's Strategy in ensuring that children and young people have a voice in the design, delivery and monitoring of services and policies that affect their lives, at national and local level.

The DCYA is continuously learning from working with children and young people and in partnership with organisations in the child and youth sectors. Its work is based on the belief that children and young people are the citizens of today, with accompanying rights and responsibilities, and not simply the adults of tomorrow.

The DCYA is responsible for overseeing the development and improvement of participation structures and also undertakes specific participation initiatives in partnership with statutory bodies, Government departments and non-governmental organisations. The DCYA is working to become a centre of excellence for participation by children and young people in decision-making; it recognises that such participation does not simply happen, but requires champions, structures, systems and processes at national, local and organisational level.

In the last 8 years, the DCYA has worked to ensure the establishment or consolidation of 6 key structures/processes, including:
- Comhairle na nÓg (local youth councils);
- Dáil na nÓg (national youth parliament);
- Children and Young People's Participation Support Team;
- Inclusion Programme for seldom-heard children/young people;
- DCYA Children and Young People's Forum;
- national consultations/dialogues with children and young people.

Evaluation of all DCYA initiatives and structures has been a strong feature of the work since the outset. The in-depth evaluation of the Comhairle na nÓg Development Fund, now in its fourth year, has indicated clearly that there is a requirement for a more thorough knowledge of participation activity and structures.

Accordingly, the DCYA commissioned this audit of all children and young people's participation activity within the statutory and non-statutory sectors, to inform development of a national policy on children and young people's participation in decision-making for the forthcoming National Children's Strategy (2012 – 2017).

AIM OF THE AUDIT

The aim of the audit was to document participation activity currently underway in both statutory and non-statutory organisations working with children and young people in the age range 0-18 years. The focus was on participation in relation to issues that affect the lives of children and young people as a group.

METHODOLOGY

Four separate online surveys were developed with the use of a popular online survey tool. The first was aimed at Comhairle na nÓg and other organisations, the second at the HSE and HSE-funded services, the third at Student Councils and the fourth at Student Council Liaison Teachers.

REPORT STRUCTURE

The report is set out in 4 parts to reflect the 4 separate online surveys developed for the study:

- Part 1 outlines the main findings from the survey of Comhairle na nÓg and other organisations.
- Part 2 outlines the main findings from the survey of the HSE and HSE-funded services.
- Part 3 outlines the main findings from the survey of Student Councils.
- Part 4 outlines the main findings from the brief survey of Student Council Liaison Teachers.

SURVEY OF ORGANISATIONS

This section of the report is an audit of children and young people's participation in decision-making in organisations that work with and on behalf of young people, including Comhairle na nÓg.

CONTENTS

OVERVIEW

INTRODUCTION

This section of the report details the findings of the survey of Comhairle na nÓg and other organisations. The aim of the survey was to document children and young people's involvement in decision-making activity within Comhairle na nÓg and other organisations that work with those aged 18 years and younger. A large proportion of responses to the survey were from Comhairle na nÓg. Other organisations that responded were mainly from the youth sector.

METHODOLOGY

An online survey, which took approximately 15-20 minutes to complete, was developed with the use of a popular online survey design tool (Survey Monkey). This survey was disseminated to all Comhairle na nÓg Coordinators and any organisations involved in organising Comhairle. The DCYA's Children and Youth Participation Officers then promoted the survey and encouraged people to complete it. The survey was also disseminated to all organisations that work with or on behalf of young people, including national youth organisations and any organisations that work with seldom-heard children and young people. Examples of such organisations include the National Youth Council of Ireland (NYCI), the Children's Rights Alliance, Foróige, Youth Work Ireland and all organisations that had been part of the DCYA's Inclusion Programme.

A link to the online survey was sent to all Comhairlí na nÓg and other organisations in an e-mail that outlined the aims and objectives of the study. Respondents simply clicked on the link to open the survey, which they then completed online. The survey was completed by respondents between July and November 2010.

The survey included measures of demographic variables, participation levels and methods, impacts and supports, as well as attitudes and perceptions. Follow-ups were conducted with Comhairlí na nÓg that did not respond in order to increase the response rate. Overall, 29 out of a total of 34 Comhairlí na nÓg responded to the survey. While the survey was constructed primarily for the purposes of gathering quantitative data, some qualitative data was also collected to provide participants with the opportunity to make more in-depth comments. Quantitative data was analysed with the use of the online survey tool and any qualitative data was systematically and thematically analysed. A copy of the survey is provided in Appendix A.

CHAPTER 1:   PROFILE OF ORGANISATIONS

1.1   TYPES OF ORGANISATIONS

A total of 71 organisations responded to the survey. Overall, 29 respondents (40.8%) were from Comhairle na nÓg and 42 (59.2%) were from other organisations, such as youth services, organisations and clubs, statutory organisations, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), local authorities, VECs, voluntary organisations, a political youth wing, a charity, a Community Development Project, a Diocesan Youth Agency and a religious organisation.

1.2   GEOGRAPHICAL SPREAD OF ORGANISATIONS

Organisations were asked to detail the counties they operate in. All counties had a fairly even coverage of organisations, with Dublin and Galway having the highest coverage (*see Table 1*).

TABLE 1: GEOGRAPHICAL SPREAD OF ORGANISATIONS

Counties	% of organisations covering each county	No. of organisations covering each county
Carlow	20.3%	14
Cavan	23.2%	16
Clare	20.3%	14
Cork	21.7%	15
Donegal	24.6%	17
Dublin	33.3%	23
Galway	30.4%	21
Kerry	21.7%	15
Kildare	23.2%	16
Kilkenny	23.2%	16
Laois	21.7%	15
Leitrim	20.3%	14
Limerick	23.2%	16
Longford	21.7%	15
Louth	21.7%	15
Mayo	20.3%	14
Meath	23.2%	16
Monaghan	18.8%	13
Offaly	21.7%	15
Roscommon	20.3%	14
Sligo	17.4%	12
Tipperary	26.1%	18
Waterford	20.3%	14
Westmeath	21.7%	15
Wexford	21.7%	15
Wicklow	24.6%	17

Similarly, organisations were asked to detail which local authorities they interact with (*see Table 2*). Fingal County Council, Dublin City Council, South Dublin County Council and Louth County Council were the local authorities most frequently dealt with by organisations.

**TABLE 2: LOCAL AUTHORITIES ORGANISATIONS DEAL WITH**

Local Authority (LA)	% of organisations dealing with each LA	No. of organisations dealing with each LA
Carlow County Council	14.3%	9
Cavan County Council	15.9%	10
Claire County Council	11.1%	7
Cork City Council	11.1%	7
Cork County Council	11.1%	7
Donegal County Council	15.9%	10
Dublin City Council	20.6%	13
Dun Laoghaire–Rathdown County Council	19%	12
Fingal County Council	23.8%	15
South Dublin County Council	20.6%	13
Galway City Council	15.9%	10
Galway County Council	15.9%	10
Kerry County Council	11.1%	7
Kildare County Council	12.7%	8
Kilkenny County Council	14.3%	9
Laois County Council	14.3%	9
Leitrim County Council	9.5%	6
Limerick City Council	14.3%	9
Limerick County Council	14.3%	9
Longford County Council	12.7%	8
Louth County Council	20.6%	13
Mayo County Council	11.1%	7
Meath County Council	17.5%	11
Monaghan County Council	14.3%	9
Offaly County Council	17.5%	11
Roscommon County Council	17.5%	11
Sligo County Council	11.1%	7
North Tipperary County Council	14.3%	9
South Tipperary County Council	15.9%	10
Waterford City Council	11.1%	7
Waterford County Council	12.7%	8
Westmeath County Council	15.9%	10
Wexford County Council	14.3%	9
Wicklow County Council	17.5%	11

1.3   AGE RANGES OF SERVICE USERS

Organisations were asked to indicate the age ranges of the children and young people they work with and develop policies and services for. A total of 69 organisations responded to this question (97% of total respondents). Of these, 66 (95.7%) work with young people aged 13-17 years; 31 (44.9%) work

with children aged 5-12 years; and 12 (17.4%) work with children aged 0-4 years. Just 3 organisations (4.3%) said they have no specific focus on children and young people (*see Figure 1*).

FIGURE 1: AGE RANGES OF SERVICE USERS
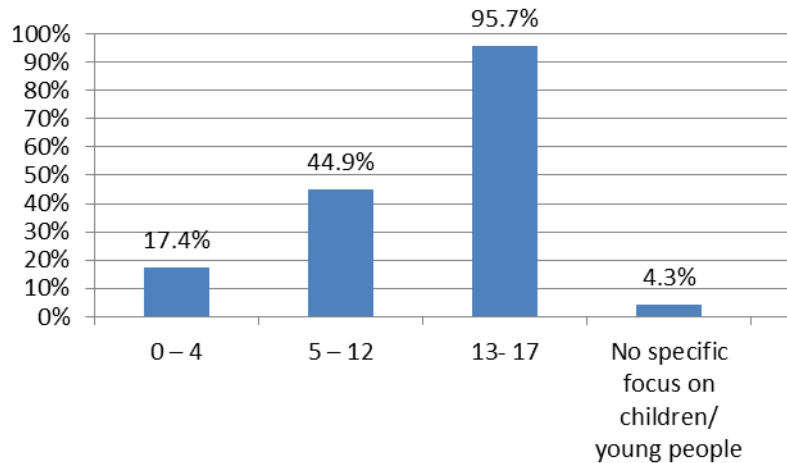
1.4   INVOLVEMENT OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN DECISION-MAKING IN ORGANISATIONS

Organisations were asked if they involve children and young people in decision-making in relation to the policies, strategies or services they deliver or for which they are responsible. All 71 organisations responded to this question. Overall, 57 organisations (80.3%) are currently involving children and young people in decision-making, while 6 (8.5%) have involved children and young people in decision-making in the past. A further 3 organisations (4.2%) have plans to do so in the future, whereas 3 (4.2%) have no plans to include children and young people in decision-making in their organisation. Just 2 organisations (2.8%) were unaware if they involve children and young people in decision-making (*see Figure 2*).

FIGURE 2: INVOLVEMENT OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN DECISION-MAKING
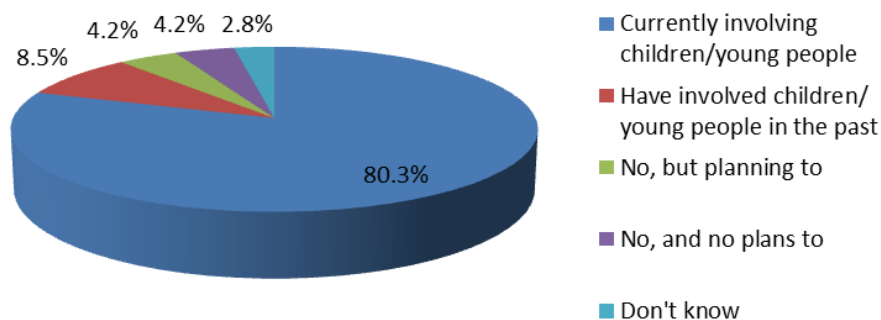
CHAPTER 2: PARTICIPATION ACTIVITY

The information in this chapter was only sought from organisations that currently include children and young people in decision-making or that have done so in the past. Therefore, it should be noted that percentages in this section relate to the number of respondents that have involved children and young people in decision-making rather than all respondents that answered the survey.

2.1 TYPE OF PARTICIPATION

Of the 62 organisations that responded to this question (87.3% of total respondents), 58 (93.5%) stated children and young people's participation was an ongoing process, whereas just 4 (6.5%) said it was a once-off event.

2.2 CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S PARTICIPATION INFLUENCE LEVELS

Of the 60 organisations that responded (84.5% of total respondents), 55 (91.7%) stated that decisions children and young people are involved in have an influence at a local level; 37 (61.7%) stated that decisions have an influence at an organisational level; and 30 (50%) stated that they have an influence at a national level (*see Figure 3*).

FIGURE 3: CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S PARTICIPATION INFLUENCE LEVELS
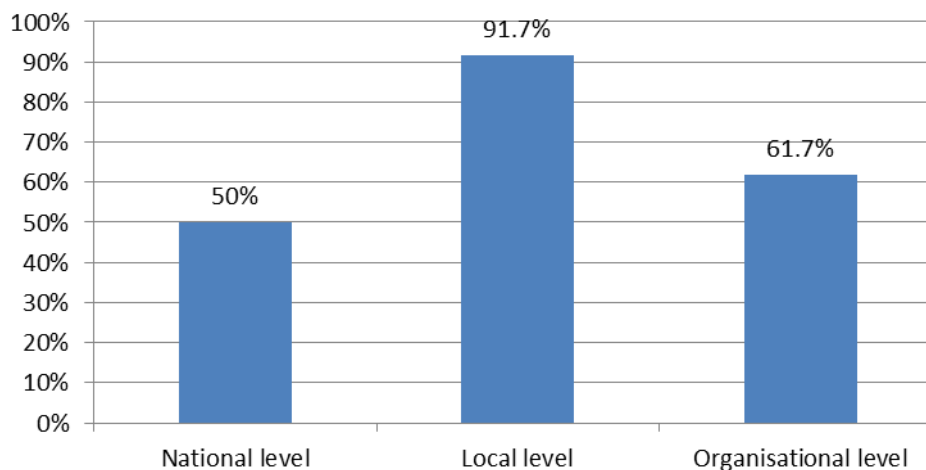
2.3   KEY CONSULTATION ISSUES

Organisations were asked to outline the key issues they involve children and young people in as regards decision-making. Out of the 61 organisations that responded (86% of total respondents), the most common issue children and young people are consulted on was youth services (78.7%), followed by leisure and recreation (63.9%), mental health (57.4%), education (50.8%), community safety and crime (47.5%), environmental issues (39.3%), sexual health (37.7%), physical health (32.8%), transport (29.5%), other issues (24.6%), social services (16.4%), regeneration (9.8%) and housing (6.6%) (*see Table 3*).

TABLE 3: KEY ISSUES ORGANISATIONS CONSULT WITH CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE ON

Issues	% of organisations	No. of organisations
Youth services	78.7%	48
Leisure/recreation	63.9%	39
Mental health	57.4%	35
Education	50.8%	31
Community safety/crime	47.5%	29
Environmental issues	39.3%	24
Sexual health	37.7%	23
Physical health	32.8%	20
Transport	29.5%	18
Other	24.6%	15
Social services	16.4%	10
Regeneration	9.8%	6
Housing	6.6%	4

Other issues organisations involve children and young people in included:

- children and young people's personal needs;
- family and children/young people's services;
- community development and education;
- peace and conflict resolution;
- culture and the arts;
- discrimination and racism;
- Board-level decisions;
- Church-related activities;
- staffing;
- children and young people's participation at national, EU and international level;
- poverty and social inclusion;
- UN Convention on the Rights of the Child;
- recruitment and selection of the Ombudsman for Children;
- any other issues children and young people are interested in.

2.4   LENGTH OF TIME CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE INVOLVED IN DECISION-MAKING

Respondents were asked how long their organisation has been involving children and young people in decision-making. Out of the 61 organisations that responded (85.9% of total respondents), 42 (68.9%) have been involving children and young people in decision-making for the last 5 or more years; 4 (6.6%) for the last 4 years; one (1.6%) for the last 3 years; 10 (16.4%) for the last 2 years; 2 (3.3%) for the last year; and 2 (3.3%) were unsure (*see Figure 4*).

FIGURE 4: LENGTH OF TIME INVOLVING CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN DECISION-MAKING
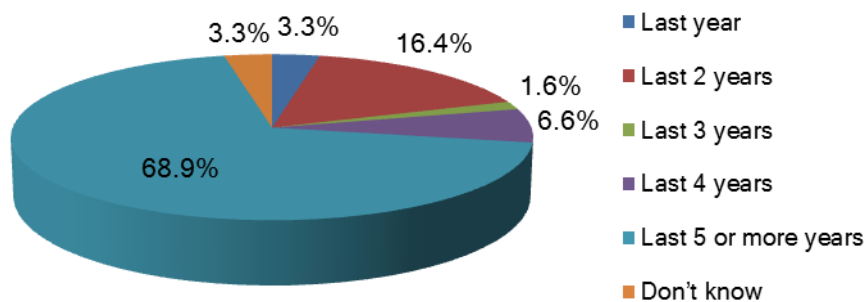
Out of the 61 organisations that responded (85.9 % of total respondents), 49 (80.3%) said the amount of work they do to involve children and young people in decision-making has increased in the last 3 years, while 12 (19.7%) said it has remained the same. No organisation reported this type of work had decreased.

CHAPTER 3:   PARTICIPATION LEVELS AND METHODS

The information in this chapter was sought from all organisations. However, questions were more relevant to those that currently include children and young people in decision-making or that have done so in the past.

3.1   LEVELS OF INVOLVEMENT

Organisations were asked about the levels at which they involve children and young people in decision-making. Out of the 65 organisations who responded (91.5% of total respondents), the most common way of involving children and young people in decision-making was asking for their ideas when developing new policies and services, which was cited by 55 organisations (84.6%), or when changing or developing existing policies and services, which was cited by 50 organisations (76.9%). 46 organisations (70.8%) ask children and young people to identify the policies and services that matter to them; 38 (58.5%) involve children and young people in monitoring or evaluating services and policies; 36 (55.4%) involve children and young people in the delivery of services; and 30 (46.2%) involve children and young people in decisions that are made about them as individuals, for example, health matters, family issues and custody issues. Only one organisation (1.5%) stated that children and young people are not involved in decision-making on any level in their organisation (*see Table 4*).

TABLE 4: LEVELS OF INVOLVEMENT OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN DECISION-MAKING

Levels of involvement	%	No. of organisations
Asking for their ideas when developing new policies and/or services	84.6%	55
Asking for their ideas when changing or developing existing policies and/or services	76.9%	50
In identifying the policies and/or services that matter to children and young people	70.8%	46
In monitoring or evaluating services and/or policies	58.5%	38
In the delivery of services	55.4%	36
In decisions that are made about them as individuals (e.g. health matters, family issues, custody issues)	46.2%	30
Children and young people are not involved in decision-making on any level	1.5%	1

3.2   APPROACHES TO INVOLVING CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN DECISION-MAKING

Of the 65 organisations that responded to this question (91.5% of total respondents), the most common approach taken to involve children and young people in decision-making was through focus groups, which are used by 50 organisations (76.9%); ongoing informal consultations, which are used by 48 organisations (73.8%); surveys on specific issues, which are used by 41 organisations (63.1%); and public meetings and events, which are used by 39 organisations (60%).

34 organisations (52.3%) have conducted research into children and young people's views and needs; the same number of organisations have permanent youth councils and forums; 31 organisations (47.7%) have children and young people's advisory or reference groups; 29 organisations (44.6%) use child- and youth-friendly literature; 24 organisations (36.9%) use e-mail and text-messaging; and 14 organisations (21.5%) use interactive websites designed specifically for children and young people (*see Table 5*).

TABLE 5: APPROACHES TO INVOLVING CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN DECISION-MAKING

Approaches	%	No. of organisations
Focus groups	76.9%	50
Ongoing informal consultation with children and young people	73.8%	48
Surveys of children and young people on particular issues	63.1%	41
Public meetings and events for children and young people	60%	39
Research into children and young people's views and needs	52.3%	34
Permanent youth councils/forums	52.3%	34
Children and young people's advisory or reference groups	47.7%	31
Child- and youth-friendly literature	44.6%	29
E-mail/text-messaging	36.9%	24
Interactive websites specifically for children and young people	21.5%	14
Other	12%	8

It should be noted that the strong representation of Comhairle na nÓg (40.8%) among respondents most probably influenced the approaches mentioned in Table 5. 12.3% of respondents cited 'other' approaches taken by their organisations, which included encouraging young people to become Board members, to participate in interagency meetings where decisions are made, to participate in action research projects, to actively participate in their own assessments, and to set up their own committees. For example, one organisation has assisted young people in developing a youth residents' committee in their area.

CHAPTER 4: REACHING CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

The information in this chapter was only sought from organisations that currently include children and young people in decision-making or that have done so in the past. Therefore, it should be noted that percentages in this section relate to the number of respondents that have involved children and young people in decision-making rather than all respondents that answered the survey.

4.1 PROFILE OF SERVICE USERS INVOLVED IN DECISION-MAKING

Respondents were asked which groups of children and young people they involve in decision-making in terms of the following:

- age;
- gender;
- ethnicity;
- disability;
- settings;
- location;
- other.

4.2 AGE OF SERVICE USERS INVOLVED IN DECISION-MAKING

Out of the 63 organisations who responded to this question (88.7% of total respondents), 61 (96.8%) involve 13-15 year-olds in decision-making; 60 (95.2%) involve 16-17 year-olds; 17 (27%) involve 5-12 year-olds; and 3 (4.8%) involve children up to 4 years of age (*see Figure 5*). When these figures are compared with the age ranges of services users cited by organisations in Figure 1, it is clear that, even though fewer children under the age of 12 are using services, significantly less of this age group are involved in decision-making within organisations. For example, 31 organisations work with children aged 5-12 years, but only 17 have involved this age group in decision-making. Similarly, 12 organisations work with children aged 0-4 years, but just 3 have involved this age group in decision-making.

FIGURE 5: AGE OF SERVICE USERS INVOLVED IN DECISION-MAKING
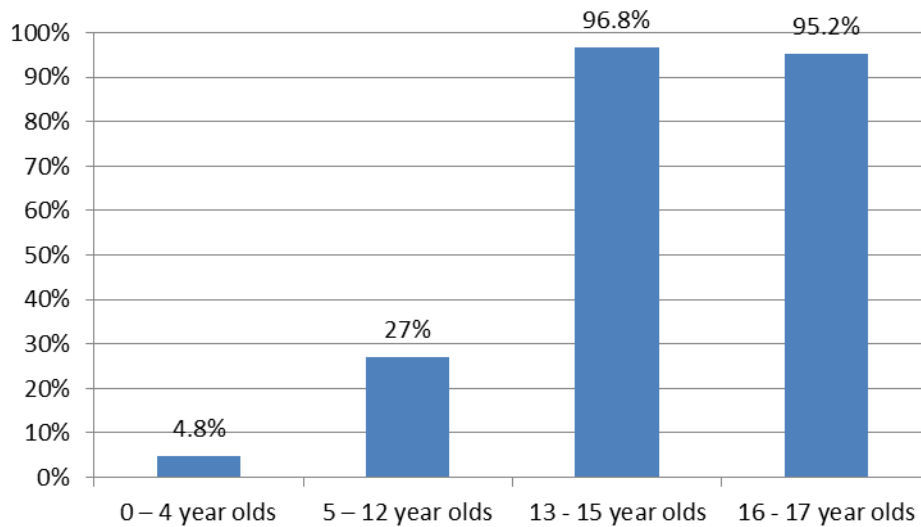
4.3 GENDER OF SERVICE USERS INVOLVED IN DECISION-MAKING

Of the 65 organisations that answered this question (91.5% of total respondents), all 65 (100%) involve girls in decision-making and 62 (95.4%) involve boys.

4.4 ETHNICITY OF SERVICE USERS INVOLVED IN DECISION-MAKING

Out of the 55 organisations that responded to this question (77.4% of total respondents), 45 (81.8%) have involved children and young people from ethnic minorities in decision-making; 43 (78.2%) have involved young Travellers; and 20 (36.4%) have involved young refugees and asylum-seekers (*see Figure 6*).

FIGURE 6: ETHNICITY OF SERVICE USERS INVOLVED IN DECISION-MAKING
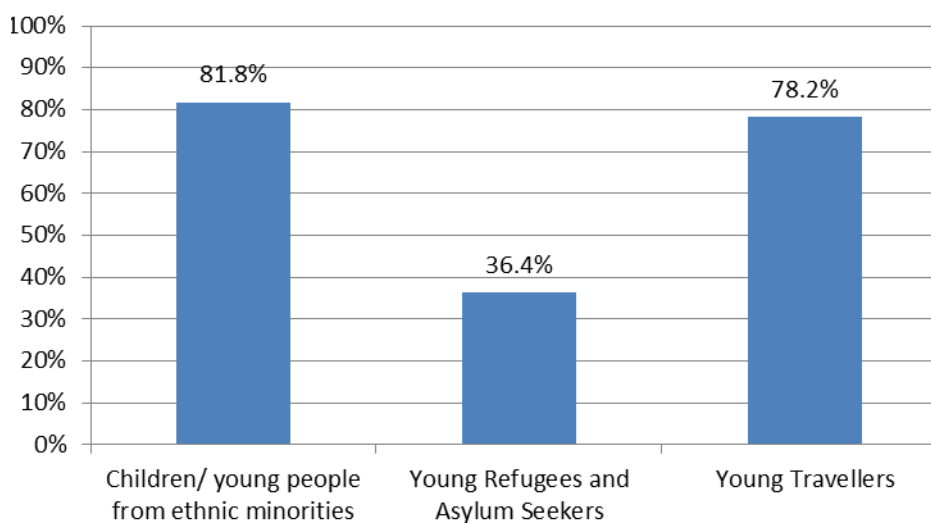
4.5 SERVICE USERS INVOLVED IN DECISION-MAKING WITH A DISABILITY

Overall, out of the 41 organisations that answered this question (57.7% of total respondents), 32 (78%) have involved children and young people with a learning difficulty in decision-making and 26 (63.4%) have involved children and young people with a physical or sensory disability (*see Figure 7*).

FIGURE 7: SERVICE USERS INVOLVED IN DECISION-MAKING WITH A DISABILITY
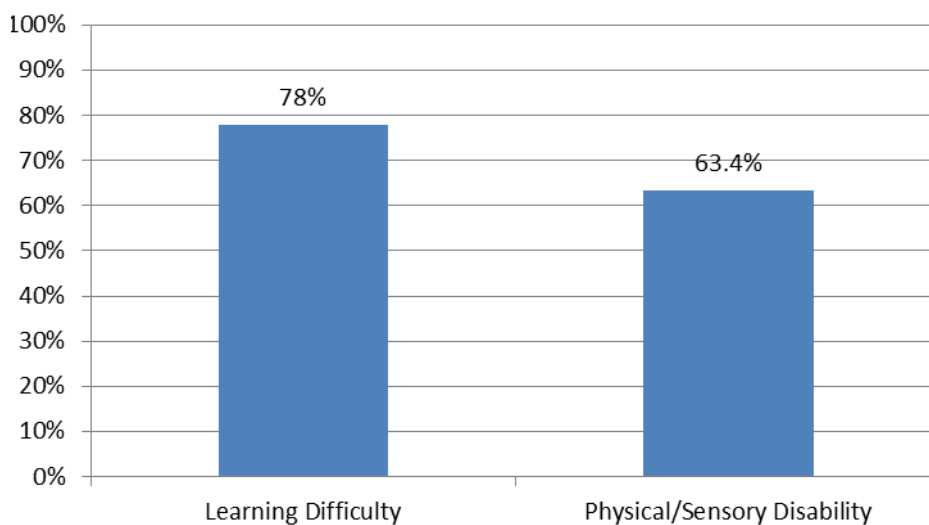
4.6 SERVICE USERS INVOLVED IN DECISION-MAKING IN CARE OR IN HOSPITAL

There was a very low response rate to this question, with just 16 organisations responding (22.5% of total respondents). Out of these 16 organisations, 14 (87.5%) have involved children and young people currently in foster care in decision-making, while just 8 (50%) have involved those formerly in foster care. Eight (50%) organisations have involved children and young people currently in residential care and the same figure have involved those formerly in residential care. Only 2 organisations (12.5%) have involved children and young people in hospital in decision-making (*see Figure 8*).

FIGURE 8: SERVICE USERS INVOLVED IN DECISION-MAKING IN CARE OR HOSPITAL
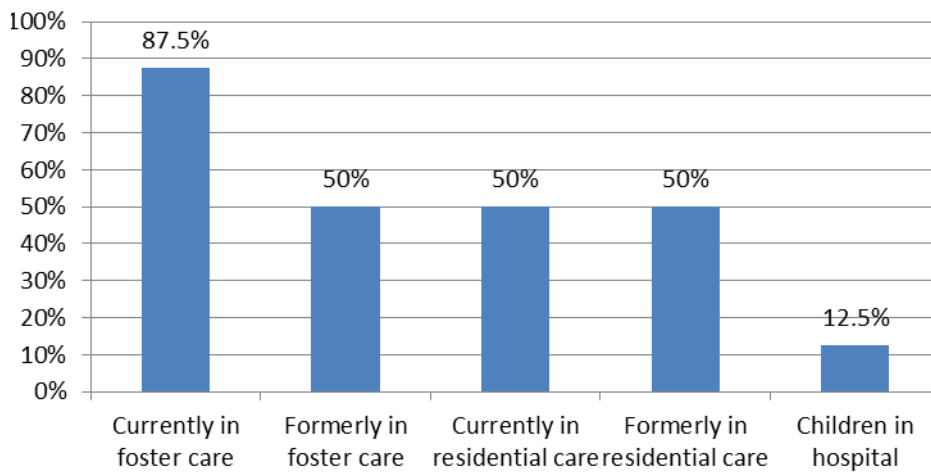
4.7 INVOLVEMENT OF URBAN AND RURAL BASED SERVICE USERS IN DECISION-MAKING

Of the 64 organisations who responded to this question (90.1% of total respondents), 62 (96.9%) involve children and young people from urban areas in decision-making and 50 (78.1%) involve children and young people from rural areas.

4.8 OTHER GROUPS INVOLVED IN DECISION-MAKING

In total, 47 organisations responded to this question (66.1% of total respondents). Of these, 43 (91.5%) have involved early school-leavers in decision-making; 29 (61.7%) have involved young offenders; and 27 (57.4%) have involved lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered (LGBT) young people (*see Figure 9*).

FIGURE 9: OTHER GROUPS INVOLVED IN DECISION-MAKING
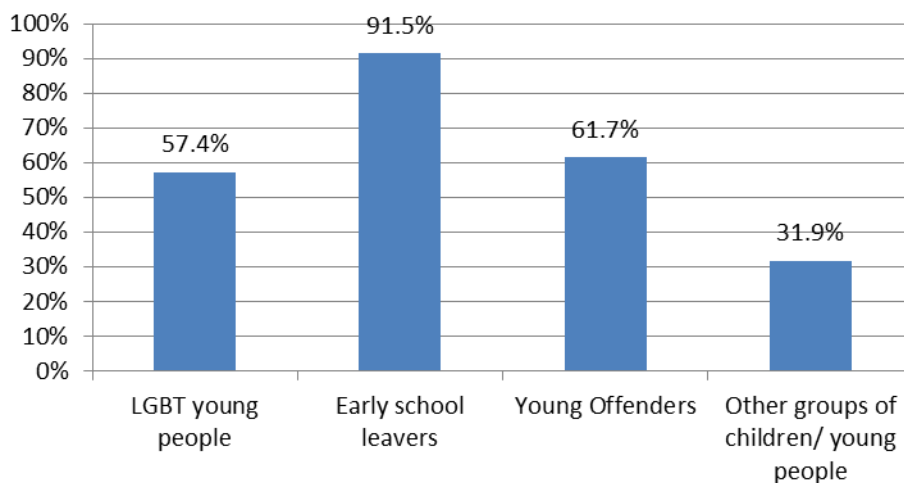
15 organisations (31.9%) have involved other children and young people, such as those:

- in vulnerable situations;
- economically or socially disadvantaged;
- affected by drug and/or alcohol misuse;
- with behavioural difficulties;
- at risk of offending;
- potential early school-leavers;
- school-going children and young people;
- seldom-heard;
- living in residential hostels;
- from a variety of religious backgrounds;
- using homeless services;
- separated children (either seeking asylum, with refugee status, with residency status, with leave to remain or with unknown status).

One Comhairle na nÓg commented on the difficulty of identifying the profile of children and young people involved in their Comhairle since they do not ask them to specify such details.

4.9   HARD-TO-REACH CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

Of the 61 organisations that responded to this question (85.9% of total respondents), 41 (67.2%) agreed they find it hard to reach specific groups of children and young people, while 20 organisations (32.8%) disagreed. Respondents were asked to specify which groups of children and young people their organisation finds hardest to reach.

Young Travellers and children and young people from ethnic minorities were identified as the hardest groups to reach. According to one organisation, it is difficult to involve these groups because they may have been excluded from services in the past and often do not see the point of engaging.

Early school-leavers and children and young people with a disability are two other significant groups that were highlighted as being difficult to reach. One organisation found it much more difficult to involve children and young people with disabilities compared to those without disabilities.

Other groups of children and young people who are classified as hard to reach in the study included those in care, those disconnected from services, lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered (LGBT) young people, marginalised and disadvantaged children and young people, those living in rural areas, young offenders and drug users. However, despite these difficulties, organisations report a significant involvement of certain 'seldom-heard' children and young people.

4.10   TARGETING HARD-TO-REACH CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

Overall, 31 organisations (43.6% of total respondents) have identified effective ways of targeting hard-to-reach children and young people. The most common approach organisations have found to be effective in targeting these groups was outreach work with relevant organisations, groups, schools, centres and agencies that work with target groups.

Building relationships with children and young people, parents, the community, and hard-to-reach groups was also mentioned as an effective method. For example, one organisation has developed a 'drop-in' space catering for young Travellers, which allows youth workers to develop relationships and enable participation in Comhairle na nÓg, as well as youth programmes and services.

Similarly, programmes, services and information targeted at specific hard-to-reach groups were outlined as being effective. Participation on committees, networks and working groups that deal with hard-to-reach children and young people was another way organisations target these groups. Organisations also involve targeted groups when developing committees.

In addition, events such as taster days, forums, 'road show' type consultations, brainstorming sessions and workshops were mentioned by organisations. Engaging with young people online and through social networks, as well as providing accessible and youth-friendly resources online, were considered to be successful ways to target hard-to-reach groups.

Other methods identified by respondents included positive discrimination and capacity-building. For example, Comhairle na nÓg conduct 'one-to-one' work with hard-to-reach children and young people to build their capacity to take part in meetings and activities.

One organisation stated that its broad-based inclusion ethos helps to target hard-to-reach children and young people.

CHAPTER 5:   IMPACT OF PARTICIPATION

The information in this chapter was only sought from organisations that currently include children and young people in decision-making or that have done so in the past. Therefore, it should be noted that percentages in this section relate to the number of respondents that have involved children and young people in decision-making rather than all respondents that answered the survey.

5.1   INFLUENCE OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE ON DECISIONS

Organisations were asked how much influence they think children and young people have on decisions they make. Of the 65 organisations that responded to this question (91.5% of total respondents), 15 (23.1%) believe children and young people have a great deal of influence; 44 (67.7%) believe they have some influence in particular areas; and 6 (9.2%) believe they have very little influence. No organisation involved in participation activity believes children and young people have no influence at all in terms of decision-making within their organisation (*see Figure 10*).

FIGURE 10: INFLUENCE OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE ON DECISIONS WITHIN ORGANISATIONS
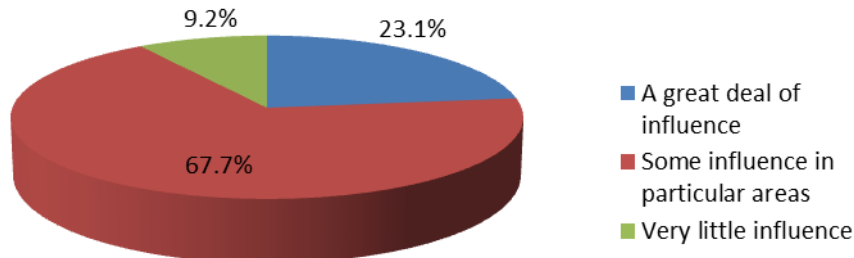
5.2   IMPACT OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S PARTICIPATION

A total of 64 organisations responded to this question (90.1% of total respondents). Of these, 45 respondents (70.3%) stated that participation of children and young people in their organisation has influenced decisions about issues that affect children and young people directly; 42 (65.6%) believe participation has influenced the changing or development of existing policies and services within their organisation; and 39 (60.9%) agreed that participation has influenced the development of new policies and services in their organisation. Just 2 respondents (3.1%) felt children and young people's participation had no impact in these areas within their organisation (*see Table 6*).

TABLE 6: IMPACT OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S PARTICIPATION

Impact	%	No.
Influenced decisions about issues/matters that affect young people directly	70.3%	45
Influenced the changing or development of existing policies and/or services	65.6%	42
Influenced the development of a new policy and/or service	60.9%	39
None of the above	3.1%	2

Respondents were asked to give specific examples of the impact of involving children and young people in decision-making in their organisation. Examples given are described below.

i.   POLICY DEVELOPMENT

Children and young people having a say in policy development was identified as the key impact of children and young people's participation. The areas in which children and young people are having an input into policy development include sport, play, recreation, transport, the environment, libraries, museums, active citizenship, child protection, children and family services, drugs and sexual health.

Children and young people are feeding into policy development at national, local and organisational levels. At national level, they have been consulted in relation to publications on consulting with children and young people on public policy development such as *Young Voices* (2005) and *Hearing Young Voices* (2002). *Our Voices, Our Realities: A Report to the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child by Children Living in Ireland* (2006) was the first-ever such children's report submitted to the UN Committee. At local level, children and young people in some counties are influencing County Development Plans and County Development Board Strategies. Within organisations, many children and young people are having a say in the development of strategies for children and young people and in participation policies.

The following quotes from organisations detail the impact of children and young people's participation on policy development:

- *'Young people were involved in consultations for the Clare Sports and Recreation Strategy.'*
- *'The best example is that of the consultation process around the Kerry Library Plan, where the young people's input resulted in real changes to the Plan.'*
- *'The organisation's youth strategy is being shaped almost exclusively by young people.'*

ii.   SERVICE AND PROGRAMME DEVELOPMENT

Another key finding in the study is the impact children and young people are having on service and programme development, particularly in relation to youth services. Other areas where children and young people have had an input into developing services and programmes include physical and mental health, sport, drugs, racism, suicide awareness, the arts, early school-leaving, transport, and

services for young asylum-seekers and refugees, Travellers and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered (LGBT) young people. Quotes detailing the impact on services and programmes include:

- *'Seasonal programmes are wholly devised by young people, which makes it easier for us as [if] young people decide what to do they will turn up for it!'*

- *'The Comfort Zone for young people from asylum-seeking and refugee community was set up after expressed need by young people for a safe space to address issues of racism.'*

iii.   YOUTH FACILITIES

Children and young people have also had an impact on the development of youth facilities and their design, primarily youth cafés. Other facilities on which children and young people have been consulted include skate parks, a community house, 'youth zones' in libraries and the planning of new libraries. Some children and young people were been involved in youth-led research at the development stages of youth cafés. The design and décor of youth cafés and skate parks were similarly influenced by children and young people. Some organisations involve children and young people in decision-making on the running of services and facilities, e.g. opening hours. There was one incidence of children and young people being involved in the development of youth facilities in a local regeneration project and another in relation to the evaluation of a youth café project:

- *'Relevant personnel met with the Comhairle to discuss the County Development Plan and the Comhairle were directly involved in the establishment of a youth café in South Dublin.'*

- *'Fingal County Council introduced a new skate park because of the pressure brought to bear by young people from Fingal Comhairle na nÓg. Once agreed in principle, they went on to influence the design and painting of the park.'*

iv.   REPRESENTATION OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE ON THE BOARDS OF ORGANISATIONS

Another outcome of children and young people's participation is representation on the Boards of organisations. A number of organisations have set up sub-groups or sub-committees where children and young people are represented and have a say in relation to issues such as the development of services and funding applications. Some young people have set up committees on their own initiative:

- *'Under the Comhairle na nÓg structure, young people in Mullingar established a sub-committee of youth and adults from agencies to work together to apply for funding for a youth café in Mullingar.'*

- *'The young people have initiated a youth residents' committee for the area and have taken the initiative to write to Councillors with their findings and solutions for a better infrastructure for the area.'*

v.   AWARENESS CAMPAIGNS

Children and young people have been involved in the development of awareness campaigns aimed at their age group, such as road safety and 'head shop' awareness campaigns.

vi.   RECRUITMENT OF STAFF

In a small number of organisations, children and young people have been actively involved in the recruitment of staff members. Most significantly, children and young people were involved in the recruitment and selection process for Ireland's first Ombudsman for Children in 2003.

vii.   CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN CARE

In the area of care, children and young people participated in the development of *Standards for Young People in Care Settings* by the Health Information and Equality Authority (HIQA). Hearing the voice of children and young people in care at meetings has also given those working with them a greater understanding of their needs:

- *'Professionals at an interagency meeting hearing a child's own words when they described "What it is like to be me" and "What needs to change in my family".'*

viii.   INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIA

Through the Children's Rights Alliance, children and young people have participated in symposia and projects at a worldwide and EU level to establish children's views, experiences and preferences for involvement in European and international decision-making processes.

ix.   OTHER AREAS

In a number of organisations, children and young people have identified specific needs to be addressed. For example, a group of young people in one organisation expressed a wish to stop using cannabis. The organisation tackled the issue through various methodologies and collaboration with their Local Drugs Task Force.

x.   FURTHER NEEDS IDENTIFIED

One organisation argued that more progress is needed in terms of the impact of children and young people on decision-making. They believe Comhairle na nÓg needs to be recognised as the 'valid voice of young people' in their county by local decision-makers since this has not always been the case in their experience.

Another organisation outlined the need to involve a wider range of children and young people from different backgrounds in decision-making processes.

5.3   ASSESSMENT OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S PARTICIPATION

Of the 60 organisations that responded to this question (84.5% of total respondents), 38 (63.3%) most commonly use monitoring to measure the impact of children and young people's participation; 35 (58.3%) use self-evaluation; 22 (36.7%) use formal evaluations; and 10 (16.7%) use other types of assessment. Just 5 organisations (8.3%) felt no assessment was needed (*see Figure 11*).

FIGURE 11: TYPES OF ASSESSMENT OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S PARTICIPATION
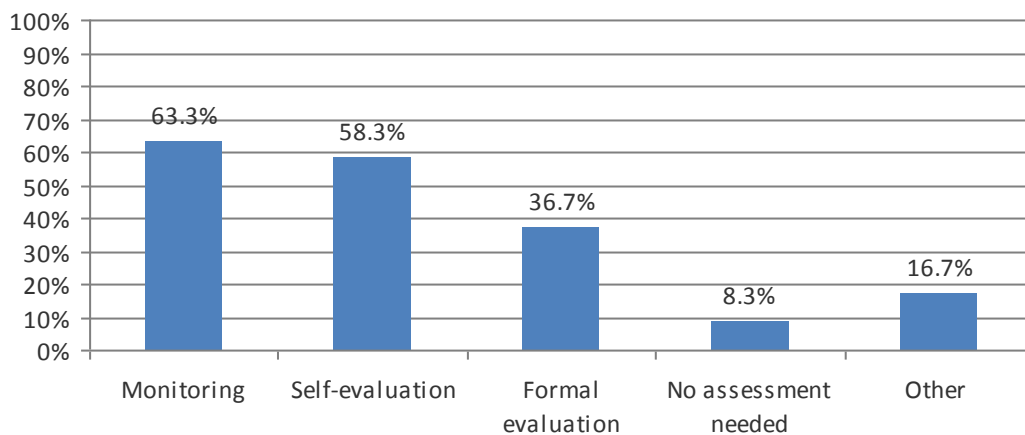
Other forms of assessment included:

- informal feedback from children, young people and leaders;
- SWOT analysis facilitated by young people;
- youth forums and meetings;
- Quality Standards Framework (Youth Work Ireland);
- case reviews;
- through Comhairle meetings and evaluations.

CHAPTER 6:   SUPPORT FOR PARTICIPATION

The information in this chapter was sought from all organisations. However, questions were more relevant to those that currently include children and young people in decision-making or that have done so in the past.

6.1   PARTICIPATION RESOURCES

There were 63 responses to this question (88.7% of total respondents). The most common type of resources that organisations allocated specifically to support children and young people's participation were:

- dedicated staff time (74.6%, 47 respondents);

- use of premises/office space (71.4%, 45 respondents);

- training and events costs (66.7%, 42 respondents);

- transport and other expenses for children and young people (50.8%, 32 respondents);

- dedicated administrative time (50.8%, 32 respondents);

- a separate funding stream/budget (44.4%, 28 respondents);

- other resources (20.6%, 13 respondents);

- no resources specifically allocated to children and young people (4.8%, 3 respondents).

Other resources allocated by organisations specifically to support children and young people's participation include fund-raising by young people and organisations, specific project-based funding and funding from other sources, such as the DCYA.

A number of organisations pointed out that while children and young people's participation is an integral part of their work, they have no specific budget to include children and young people in decision-making. Organisations also highlighted the reduction in funding for children and young people's participation, particularly in the last 2 years.

6.2   APPROACHES TO CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S PARTICIPATION

Organisations were asked to outline their approach to children and young people's participation. Out of the 62 organisations that responded (87.3% of total respondents), the most common to the least common approaches were as follows:

- Our organisation values the right of children and young people to be involved in decision-making (93.5%, 58 respondents).

- Our organisation understands the practical implications of involving children and young people in decision-making (88.7%, 55 respondents).

- Our services have improved as a result of children and young people's participation (67.7%, 42 respondents).

- Children and young people's participation is integral to the work of our organisation (61.3%, 38 respondents).

- Our organisation always ensures that children and young people know about the results of their involvement (48.4%, 30 respondents).

- Our organisation would like to involve children and young people more, but we don't have the resources (21%, 13 respondents).

- Our organisation would like to involve children and young people more, but we don't know how to (4.8%, 3 respondents).

- Our organisation has no need to involve children and young people in our decision-making processes (1.6%, 1 respondent).

- Our organisation has no interest in involving children and young people in our decision-making processes (0%, 0 respondents).

CHAPTER 7: ATTITUDES AND PERCEPTIONS

The information in this chapter was sought from all organisations.

7.1 ATTITUDES TO CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S PARTICIPATION

The survey respondents were asked to '*State the extent to which you agree or disagree with each of the following statements about decision-making*', with the following outcomes:

- ***'Children and young people have a right to be involved in public decision-making.'***

Out of 62 organisations that responded (87.3% of total respondents), 38 (61.3%) strongly agreed with this statement; 15 (24.2%) agreed; 2 (3.2%) disagreed; and 7 (11.3%) strongly disagreed (*see Figure 12*). None were unsure about the statement.

FIGURE 12: 'CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE HAVE A RIGHT TO BE INVOLVED IN PUBLIC DECISION-MAKING.'
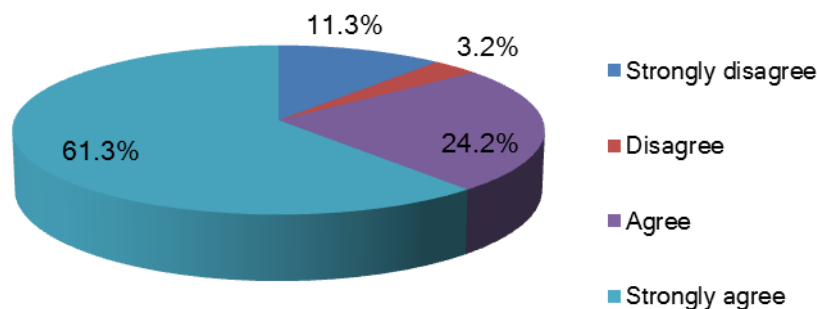
- ***'Children and young people should only be involved in decision-making where there is clear evidence about the benefits of their involvement.'***

Out of the 61 organisations that responded (85.9% of total respondents), 10 (16.4%) strongly agreed with this statement; 12 (19.7%) agreed; 20 (32.8%) disagreed; 10 (16.4%) strongly disagreed; and 9 (14.8%) were unsure (*see Figure 13*).

FIGURE 13: 'CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SHOULD ONLY BE INVOLVED IN DECISION-MAKING WHERE THERE IS CLEAR EVIDENCE ABOUT THE BENEFITS OF THEIR INVOLVEMENT.'
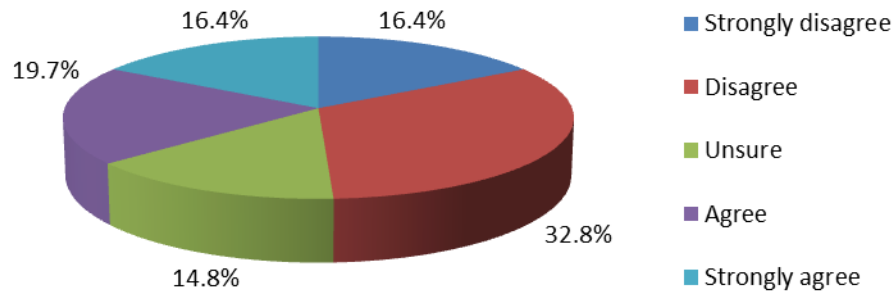
- *'It is too difficult to involve younger children in decision-making.'*

None of the 62 organisations that responded (87.3% of total respondents) strongly agreed with this statement; 7 (11.3%) agreed; 4 (6.5%) were unsure; 28 (45.2%) disagreed; and 23 (37.1%) strongly disagreed (*see Figure 14*).

FIGURE 14: 'IT IS TOO DIFFICULT TO INVOLVE YOUNGER CHILDREN IN DECISION-MAKING.'
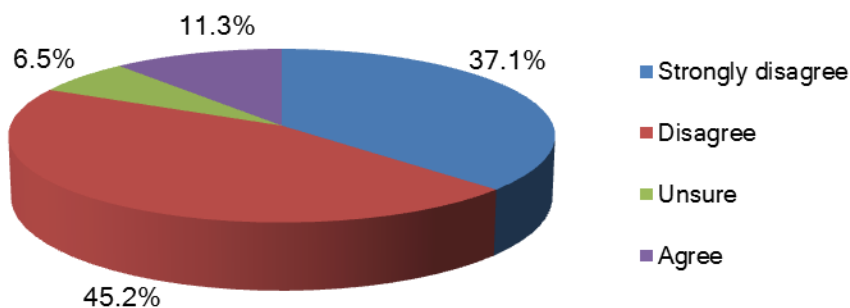
▪ *'There are no decisions which children and young people cannot be involved in,
providing they are properly supported.'*

16 (26%) out of 62 organisations (87.3% of total respondents) strongly agreed with this statement;
26 (41.9%) agreed; 12 (19.4%) were unsure; 6 (9.7%) disagreed; and 2 (3.2%) strongly disagreed
(*see Figure 15*).

**FIGURE 15: 'THERE ARE NO DECISIONS WHICH CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE CANNOT BE
INVOLVED IN, PROVIDING THEY ARE PROPERLY SUPPORTED.'**

▪ *'There are some decisions which children and young people cannot be involved in.'*

Just 3 (4.8%) out of 62 organisations (87.3% of total respondents) strongly agreed with this statement;
18 (29%) agreed; 18 (29%) were unsure; 19 (30.6%) disagreed; and 4 (6.5%) strongly disagreed
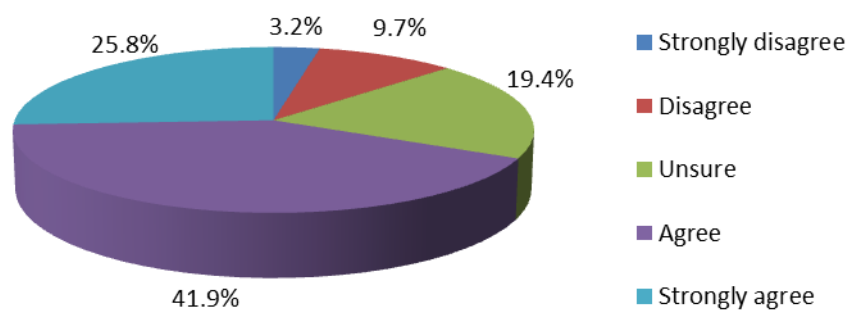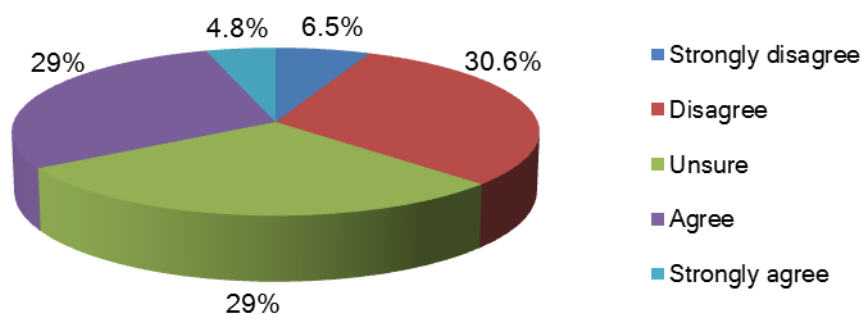(*see Figure 16*).

**FIGURE 16: 'THERE ARE SOME DECISIONS WHICH CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE CANNOT BE
INVOLVED IN.'**

7.2   FURTHER ATTITUDES TO AND EXPERIENCES OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S PARTICIPATION IN DECISION-MAKING

Organisations were asked if there was anything they would like to highlight about their experiences of or attitudes towards children and young people's participation in decision-making.

In general, organisations viewed their experiences of involving children and young people in decision-making as being positive, rewarding and of benefit to their organisation in terms of meeting children and young people's needs. They stated that children and young people are experts on all matters concerning them and should be regarded as such:

- *'Involvement of children and young people in decision-making has enhanced our organisation beyond belief. It makes the job so much easier!'*

Organisations made suggestions with regard to certain aspects of children and young people's participation. Respondents believe children and young people should only be consulted on topics that are of interest to them. Furthermore, they argued that involving children and young people in areas that are irrelevant to them may actually have a detrimental effect and discourage their involvement in the long term. It was proposed that participation topics should be suggested by children and young people themselves to guarantee their interest in the subject area.

Some organisations felt that certain topics, such as child protection, are not suitable for children and young people to discuss and make decisions on. Respondents believe all topics should be appropriate to the participants' age and the maturity of children and young people should always be taken into account when discussing sensitive subjects:

- *'The issue must be age-appropriate and meaningful to the child.'*

Similarly, the discretion of adults in relation to discussing sensitive topics was deemed to be of huge importance. Providing children and young people with sufficient, accessible and age-appropriate information was also recommended, as well as proper supports to ensure consultations are as meaningful and successful as possible.

However, other organisations wanted to highlight the abilities of children and young people to identify issues that concern them and actions to rectify problems. One organisation was impressed with how children and young people they worked with on a particular issue were able to recognise the need for policy change, rather than accepting a quick solution which would not support core changes required into the future:

- *'Children and young people are often underestimated in their ability to make rational decisions. They have a real sense of what they want and how best to get it.'*

The importance of dealing with expectations when involving children and young people in decision-making was acknowledged. Organisations stressed that expectations should be realistic and not be unduly raised by those involving children and young people in decision-making. In addition, the decision-making process should be explained simply to children and young people so they understand how it works:

- *'Children's expectations should not be raised when their views cannot realistically be taken on board and acted upon.'*

Children and young people's participation methods found by organisations to have been effective in the past included facilitation, group discussions, delegations, presentations, consultations and representation on committees that support and facilitate children and young people's participation. Committees with more than one young person were found to encourage the involvement of less confident children and young people compared to those where only one young person was involved. One organisation (Barnardos Midlands and North East region) has produced a literature review of best practice approaches to involving children and young people in their assessment and decision-making meetings.

7.3   CHALLENGES OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S PARTICIPATION

One of the key challenges identified by organisations was to meaningfully involve children and young people in decision-making in a manner which is not tokenistic. It was reported that some larger organisations can often 'pay lip service' to having children and young people's participation structures in place, when in fact these structures do not have any real power or decision-making abilities:

- *'It is a challenge to youth organisations to meaningfully involve youth in the strategic operation of an organisation, but one that is vital as it underpins the ethos of young people having a voice.'*

Another challenge faced by organisations is the representation of children and young people from all sections of society in decision-making structures. Some organisations argued that the majority of children and young people involved in participation at regional and national level are well-educated, articulate, middle-class children and young people, who do not necessarily represent those in Irish society who are most in need of supports and services. While it may be 'softer on the ear' for policy- and decision-makers to listen to this group of children and young people who are currently involved in participation, it was stated that the lack of involvement of children and young people from all sections of Irish society needs to be addressed:

- *'Formal children and young people's participation at regional and national level almost always consists of young people well on their way to making a career in decision-making!'*

A challenge encountered by a few organisations was getting adults and children and young people to work together in the area of decision-making. One organisation found that involving young people on committees or Boards alienated some older members, while adults in another organisation resisted attempts to allow young people onto committees. Suggestions for successful adult–youth partnerships included having equal and defined roles, providing training for adults as well as young people, and holding team-building and social events:

- *'Team-building and social events, as well as clear roles, make for better outcomes in adult–youth partnerships.'*

Practical difficulties faced by organisations included maintaining the involvement of children and young people, engaging 'hard to reach' children and young people, the cost of involving children and young people in decision-making in terms of staff time and transport, and supporting participation by children and young people in rural counties due to travel constraints and travel time factors.

One organisation claimed that statutory services are not youth-friendly and often alienate those children and young people who need them most. They added that children and young people's right to be treated respectfully by adults is often ignored and this can have very serious consequences for those who are particularly vulnerable and require support.

According to one organisation, the links to access decision-making structures are available, but the effective implementation of these links has not, to date, been optimised. Finally, good-quality child protection and health and safety policies were considered to be vital to ensure the welfare of children and young people involved in any type of children and young people's participation.

CHAPTER 8:   SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

Some of the key findings from this report can be categorised under the following headings:

PROFILE OF RESPONDING ORGANISATIONS

The majority of respondents were from youth-related organisations (59.2%), such as statutory services and NGOs, and the remainder were from Comhairle na nÓg (40.8%). The highest number of organisations were based in Dublin and Galway, with an even spread of organisations based in all other counties around Ireland. Similarly, organisations were most likely to deal with Dublin-based local authorities.

AGE RANGE OF SERVICE USERS

Almost all of the organisations work with young people aged 13-17 years, with fewer organisations engaging with children younger than 12.

PARTICIPATION ACTIVITY

- **INVOLVEMENT OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN DECISION-MAKING**

Overall, 4 out of 5 organisations (80.3%) are currently involving children and young people in decision-making, while a further 8.5% have done so in the past.

- **TYPE OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S PARTICIPATION**

Almost all organisations (93.5%) involved in participation activity with children and young people describe it as an ongoing process.

- **KEY CONSULTATION ISSUES**

Organisations most frequently consult with children and young people on youth services, leisure and recreation, and mental health issues.

- **LENGTH OF TIME CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE INVOLVED IN DECISION-MAKING**

Overall, 68.9% of the organisations that do involve children and young people in decision-making have been doing so for the last 5 or more years, and 80.3% of organisations involved in participation activity reported an increase in this kind of work in the last 3 years.

PARTICIPATION LEVELS AND METHODS

- **LEVELS OF INVOLVEMENT**

Organisations most typically involve children and young people in consultations on the development of new or existing policies and services.

- **APPROACHES TO INVOLVING CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN DECISION-MAKING**

Organisations tend to consult with children and young people through focus groups, ongoing informal consultations, surveys on specific issues, public meetings and events. The most cited approach of organisations to children and young people's participation was to value the right of children and young people to be involved in decision-making. Methods such as facilitation and group discussions were considered to be the most effective when consulting with children and young people.

REACHING CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

- **PROFILE OF SERVICE USERS INVOLVED IN DECISION-MAKING**

Nearly all organisations engaged in participation activity have involved teenagers in decision-making, whereas significantly less have involved younger children. Children and young people from ethnic minorities and the Travelling community, as well as early school-leavers, are the most consulted seldom-heard groups.

The least consulted groups of children and young people are those in hospital, followed by those aged 0-4 years, those formerly or currently in foster or residential care, children aged 5-12 years, young refugees and asylum-seekers, children and young people with a physical or sensory disability, lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered (LGBT) young people, young offenders, and those with a learning difficulty. Almost all organisations involve children and young people from urban areas in decision-making, while just over three-quarters involve those from rural areas.

- **HARD-TO-REACH CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE**

Children and young people from the Travelling community, ethnic minorities, early school-leavers and children and young people with a disability were the main groups identified by organisations as being difficult to engage in their services. Despite this, organisations reported good levels of involvement in decision-making from the majority of these cohorts, apart from children and young people with a physical or sensory disability. Outreach work with relevant organisations that work with target groups was considered to be the most effective means of reaching these children and young people.

IMPACT OF PARTICIPATION

- **INFLUENCE OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE ON DECISIONS**

Overall, 90.8% of organisations involved in participation activity believe children and young people have 'a great deal of influence' or 'some influence in particular areas' with regard to decision-making within their organisation. Seven out of 10 organisations (70.3%) that engage in participation activity stated that children and young people have influenced decisions about issues that affect them directly. Almost two-thirds of organisations (65.6%) that involve children and young people in decision-making believe children and young people's participation has influenced the changing or development of existing policies and services, while 60.9% agreed it has influenced new policies and services. Decision-making involving children and young people was judged to have been most influential at a local level.

- **IMPACT OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S PARTICIPATION**

Policy development involving children and young people is having the most significant impact at local and national level. Children and young people are also having a strong impact on the development of youth-targeted services and programmes, including facilities such as youth cafés.

- **ASSESSMENT OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S PARTICIPATION**

Self-evaluation was the most common method used for assessing the impact of children and young people's participation, followed by monitoring and formal evaluation.

SUPPORT FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S PARTICIPATION

Resources that organisations are most likely to allocate to children and young people's participation include dedicated staff time, the use of premises or office space, and training and events costs.

ATTITUDES AND PERCEPTIONS

Overall, 85.5% of organisations agreed or strongly agreed that children and young people have a right to be involved in public decision-making and 68% agreed or strongly agreed that there are no decisions which children and young people cannot be involved in, providing they are properly supported. Just over one-third of organisations (33.8%) agreed or strongly agreed that there are some decisions that children and young people cannot be involved in and only 11.3% of organisations agreed it is too difficult to involve younger children in decision-making. Almost half of organisations (49.2%) disagreed or strongly disagreed that children and young people should only be involved in decision-making where there is clear evidence about the benefits of their involvement.

EXPERIENCES OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S PARTICIPATION

Organisations generally reported positive experiences of children and young people's participation. Recommendations in terms of improving decision-making structures included only consulting with children and young people on issues of interest to them, ensuring topics are age-appropriate, keeping expectations realistic and making sure consultations are not tokenistic.

CHALLENGES OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S PARTICIPATION

A major concern raised by some organisations is the over-representation of middle-class, well-educated children and young people on participation structures and the under-representation of other sections of society, who are generally in need of more supports and services. Although hard-to-reach children and young people are actively involved in decision-making by many organisations, some deemed this an important issue that needs to be addressed.

Involving adults with children and young people in decision-making structures was another challenge identified by organisations. Training, team-building and equal, clear roles were suggested to rectify this issue. Practical problems were also highlighted, such as engaging hard-to-reach children and young people and developing more child- and youth-friendly statutory services.

CHAPTER 9:   KEY MESSAGES

There are a number of key messages resulting from this audit of children and young people's
participation in Comhairle na nÓg and other key organisations.

There was a very high rate of involvement of children and young people in decision-making in
Comhairle na nÓg and other organisations: 4 out of 5 respondents (80.3%) are currently involving
children and young people in decision-making, 8.5% have done do in the past and a further 4.2% plan
to do so in the future.

Of the Comhairle na nÓg and other organisations that have involved children and young people in
decision-making (88.8% of total respondents), almost all (93.5%) are involving children and young
people in decision-making on an ongoing basis and 80.3% reported an increase in this type of activity
in the last 3 years. The great majority of organisations (90.8%) engaged in participation activity
believe that children and young people have either a 'great deal' or 'some' influence on decisions
made.

Three-quarters of Comhairle na nÓg and other organisations involving children and young people in
decision-making have staff time allocated to these activities and 71.4% have dedicated premises.

Children and young people were reported to have the most significant impact with regard to decision-
making on issues that affect them directly, as well as the development of polices, services and
programmes within organisations. This is especially evident in relation to youth services, leisure and
recreation. Children and young people are also most likely to be consulted by organisations on the
development of policies, services and programmes.

Just over two-thirds of organisations (67.2%) involving children and young people in decision-making
reported difficulties in engaging 'seldom-heard' or 'hard-to-reach' groups of children and young
people. While young Travellers, ethnic minorities and early school-leavers were identified by
respondents as being the hardest to reach, the study found that these groups are among the most
consulted cohorts of 'seldom-heard' children and young people. Young people under the age of 12
are among the least consulted groups.

In general, Comhairle na nÓg and other organisations reported very positive experiences and outcomes in relation to children and young people's participation. However, challenges highlighted in the study included safeguarding against tokenism, unrealistic expectations, lack of interest, age-appropriateness and the under-representation of children and young people from all sections of society in decision-making structures.

Almost all organisations (93.5%) value the right of children and young people to be involved in decision-making and 88.7% understand the practical implications of these activities. Finally, the great majority (85.5%) of organisations 'agree' or 'strongly agree' that children and young people have a right to be involved in public decision-making.

SURVEY OF THE HSE AND HSE-FUNDED ORGANISATIONS

PART 2

This section of the report is an audit of children and young people's participation in decision-making in the HSE and HSE-funded organisations.

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OVERVIEW

INTRODUCTION

This section of the report details the findings of the survey of the HSE and HSE-funded services. The aim of the survey was to document children and young people's involvement in decision-making activity within the HSE and HSE-funded services that work with those aged 18 and younger.

METHODOLOGY

An online survey was designed and. developed with the use of a popular online survey design tool (Survey Monkey). The questionnaire took approximately 15-20 minutes to complete. A link to the online survey was sent to all sections of the HSE and to all HSE-funded initiatives for children and young people via an e-mail, which outlined the aims and objectives of the study. The survey was promoted by the Lead for Child and Youth Participation in the HSE, as well as on the HSE website and at HSE Regional Meetings. The survey was completed by respondents between July and November 2010.

The survey included measures of demographic variables, participation levels and methods, impacts and supports, as well as attitudes and perceptions. While the survey was constructed primarily for the purposes of gathering quantitative data, some qualitative data was also collected to provide participants with the opportunity to make more in-depth comments. Quantitative data was analysed with the use of the online survey tool and any qualitative data was systematically and thematically analysed. A copy of the survey is provided in Appendix B.

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SURVEY OF THE HSE
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CHAPTER 1:   PROFILE OF RESPONDING ORGANISATIONS

1.1   TYPE OF DEPARTMENT, TEAM OR ORGANISATION

In total, there were 200 responses to the survey: 89 respondents (44.5%) were from HSE Local Health Offices; 55 (27.5%) were from other HSE services; 35 (17.5%) were from HSE-funded services; and 18 (9%) were from hospital-based teams. Only 3 respondents (1.5%) did not specify which HSE team, department or organisation they were responding on behalf of (*see Figure 1*).

FIGURE 1: TYPE OF HSE DEPARTMENT/TEAM/ORGANISATION
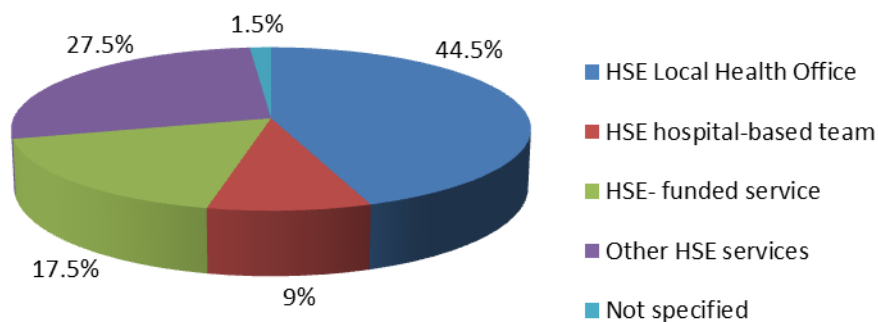
Other HSE services included:

- HSE Corporate Services and Human Resources
- HSE Regional Services
- Primary, Community and Continuing Care (PCCC) Services
- Social Work Services
- Child Care Inspectorate
- Regional Drugs Task Force
- HSE Addiction Services
- Sexual Health Forum
- Health Promotion Services
- Population Health Services
- Family Support Department
- Mental Health Services
- Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS)
- Child and Adolescent Psychiatry Team
- Mental Health Community Initiative
- Disability Act Early Intervention Teams
- Residential Child Care Service
- Aftercare Services
- Community Childcare Centre
- Programme under Children and Families Directorate
- National Directorate Child and Family Social Services
- Children and Families Training

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- HSE Risk Assessment and Consultation Service
- Crisis Intervention Centre
- High Support Units
- Respite Services
- Inter-country Adoption Services
- Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs
- Board of the new National Paediatric Hospital

Services wholly or partly funded by the HSE included:

- National youth development organisations, e.g. Foróige
- Independent NGOs, e.g. Headstrong
- Voluntary bodies, e.g. Co-action Children's Services
- Children's charities, e.g. Barnardos
- Youth-led charity, e.g. SpunOut.ie
- Charitable company, e.g. Extern Ireland
- Youth service providers with a religious ethos, e.g. Catholic Youth Care, YMCA
- Neighbourhood Youth Projects
- HSE Youth Projects
- Youth Health Services, e.g. in the Base Youth Centre and Childcare Facility in Ballyfermot
- Services promoting mental health and well-being among children and young people, e.g. Jigsaw projects
- Services supporting lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered (LGBT) young people, e.g. Rainbow Support Services
- Services working with children and young people with a disability, e.g. Irish Wheelchair Association youth services
- Services working with children and young people with substance misuse difficulties, e.g. The HALO Project, Crosscare Substance and Alcohol Service Specifically for Youth
- Services supporting families headed by teen parents, e.g. Teen Parents Support Programme
- Counselling services for children and young people and their families, e.g. Crosscare Teen Counselling Service
- Homeless agency services, e.g. Focus Ireland family and tenancy sustainment, childcare, street outreach and supported housing services
- Family and Community Resource Centres

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1.2 REGIONS COVERED

Regions covered by respondents included HSE Dublin Mid-Leinster (36.9%); HSE South (34.9%); HSE West (28.2%); and HSE Dublin North-East (27.7%) (*see Figure 2*).

FIGURE 2: REGIONS COVERED BY HSE RESPONDENTS
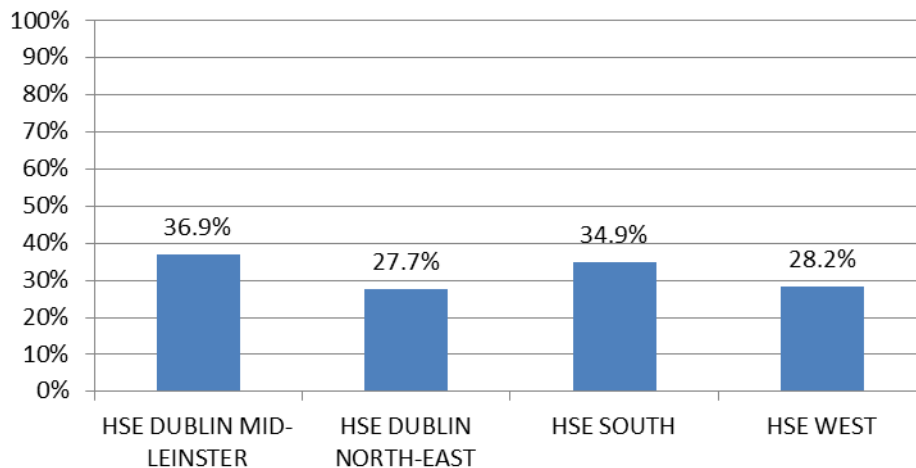
1.3 AGE RANGE OF SERVICE USERS

HSE Teams, departments, organisations and services were asked to indicate the age ranges of the children and young people they work with or develop policies and services for. A total of 197 responded to this question (98.5% of total respondents). Of these, 111 respondents (56.3%) work with children aged 0-4 years; 127 (64.5%) work with 5-12 year-olds; and 165 (83.8%) work with young people aged 13-17 years. Just 16 respondents (8.1%) said they have no specific focus on children and young people in their work (*see Figure 3*).

FIGURE 3: AGE RANGES THE HSE WORK WITH OR DEVELOPS POLICIES AND SERVICES FOR

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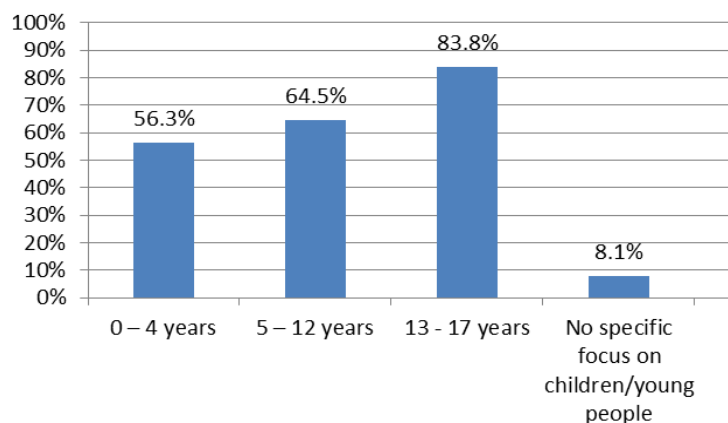
1.4   HSE NATIONAL STRATEGY FOR SERVICE USER INVOLVEMENT IN THE IRISH HEALTH SERVICE

Respondents from the HSE and HSE-funded services were asked if they had ever used the HSE *National Strategy for Service User Involvement in the Irish Health Service, 2008-2013* to help them involve children and young people in decision-making. Goal 5 of this strategy states that '*specific work will ensure the involvement of children, young people and socially excluded groups*' and '*all involvement work must make specific efforts to ensure the participation of children, young people and socially excluded groups*'. Out of the 192 that responded to this question (96% of total respondents), just 30 respondents (15.8%) had used the strategy, whereas 134 (70.5%) had not used it. A further 26 (13.7%) were unsure if they had used the strategy or not (*see Figure 4*).

FIGURE 4: USED HSE NATIONAL STRATEGY FOR SERVICE USER INVOLVEMENT IN THE IRISH HEALTH SERVICE
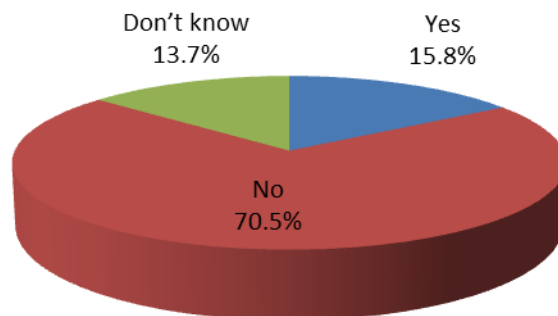
1.5   HSE GUIDELINES ON WORKING WITH CHILDREN

Similarly, respondents were asked if they had received the HSE *Guidelines on Working with Children*. Of the 195 that responded (97.5% of total respondents), 111 (56.9%) had received the HSE guidelines; 51 (26.2%) had not received the guidelines; and 33 (16.9%) were unsure if they had received them or not (*see Figure 5*).

FIGURE 5: RECEIVED HSE GUIDELINES ON WORKING WITH CHILDREN

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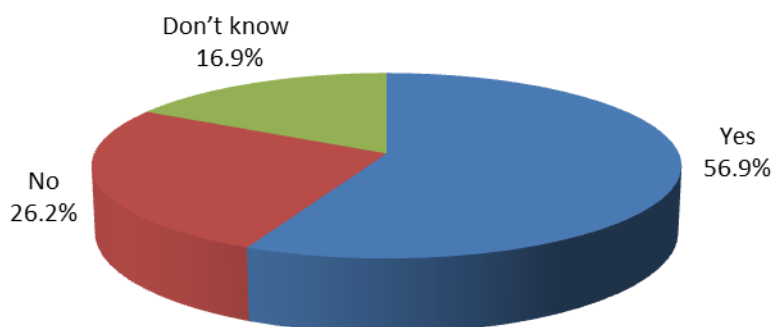
1.6   INVOLVEMENT OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN DECISION-MAKING

Of the 199 respondents from the HSE and HSE-funded services that answered this question (99.5% of total respondents), only 71 (36.2%) are currently involving children and young people in decision-making; 39 (19.9%) have involved children and young people in the past; 26 (13.3%) have never involved children and young people in decision-making, but are planning to; 34 (17.3%) have never involved children and young people and have no plans to do so; and 26 (13.3%) were unsure (*see Figure 6*).

FIGURE 6: INVOLVEMENT OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN DECISION-MAKING
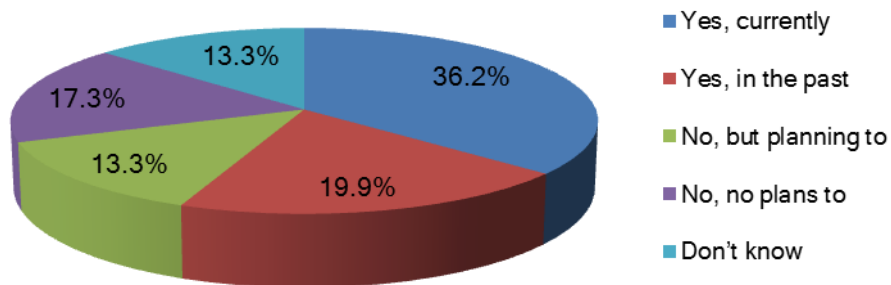
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CHAPTER 2:   PARTICIPATION ACTIVITY

The information in this chapter was only sought from respondents from the HSE and HSE-funded services that currently include children and young people in decision-making or that have done so in the past. Therefore, it should be noted that percentages in this section relate to the number of respondents that have involved children and young people in decision-making rather than all respondents that answered the survey.

2.1   TYPE OF PARTICIPATION

Of the 97 respondents that answered this question (48.5% of total respondents), 80 (82.5%) involve children and young people in decision-making as part of an ongoing process and 17 (17.5%) have done so as a once-off event.

2.2   CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S PARTICIPATION INFLUENCE LEVELS

Of the 95 teams, departments, organisations and services from the HSE that responded (47.5% of total respondents), 69 (72.6%) said decisions children and young people are involved in have an influence at a local level; 43 (45.3%) said they have an influence at an organisational level; and 26 (27.4%) said they have an influence at a national level (*see Figure 7*).

FIGURE 7: CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S PARTICIPATION INFLUENCE LEVELS

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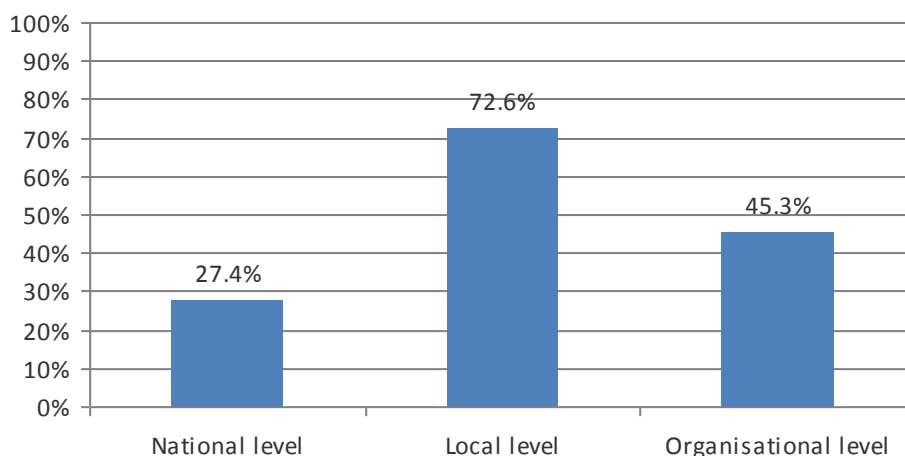
2.3   KEY CONSULTATION ISSUES

Respondents were asked to identify the key issues they consult with children and young people on. There were a total of 102 responses to this question from those that have involved children and young people in decision-making (51% of total respondents). The most frequently cited issue was mental health (51%), followed by education (40.2%), other issues (40.2%), physical health (39.2%), youth services (38.2%), leisure and recreation (37.3%), sexual health (35.3%), social services (22.5%), environmental issues (15.7%), community safety and crime (12.7%), housing (12.7%), transport (9.8%), and regeneration (2%) (*see Table 1*).

TABLE 1: KEY ISSUES HSE CONSULTS WITH CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE ON

Issues	%	No. of respondents
Mental health	51%	52
Education	40.2%	41
Other	40.2%	41
Physical health	39.2%	40
Youth services	38.2%	39
Leisure/recreation	37.3%	38
Sexual health	35.3%	36
Social services	22.5%	23
Environmental issues	15.7%	16
Community safety/crime	12.7%	13
Housing	12.7%	13
Transport	9.8%	10
Regeneration	2%	2

Other key issues the HSE and HSE-funded services consult with children and young people on include matters relating to children and young people in care (such as care plans, family conferences, custody and access) and healthcare issues. Children and young people are also consulted on issues such as alcohol and drug misuse, family conflict and supports, bullying, sexual orientation, politics and civic engagement, immigration issues and designing HSE forms.

2.4   LENGTH OF TIME CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE INVOLVED IN DECISION-MAKING

HSE teams, departments, organisations and services were asked how long they have been involving children and young people in decision-making. Of the 104 that responded (52% of total respondents), 57 (54.8%) have been involving children and young people for the last 5 or more years; 13 (12.5%) have been doing so for the last 2 years; 9 (8.7%) for the last year; 7 (6.7%) for the last 3 years; and 6 (5.8%) for the last 4 years. 12 respondents (11.5%) were unsure about how long their service, organisation, team or department had been involving children and young people in decision-making (*see Figure 8*).

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FIGURE 8: LENGTH OF TIME CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE INVOLVED IN DECISION-MAKING
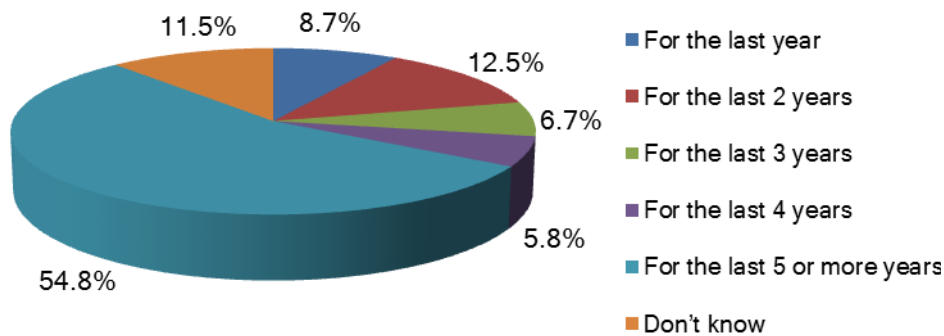
The survey asked respondents from the HSE and HSE-funded services if the amount of work they do to involve children and young people in decision-making has increased, decreased or remained the same over the past 3 years. Of the 106 that responded (53% of total respondents), 62 (58.5%) said it had increased; 5 (4.7%) said it had decreased; 33 (31.1%) said it had stayed the same; and 6 (5.7%) did not know (*see Figure 9*).

FIGURE 9: INCREASE/DECREASE IN CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S PARTICIPATION
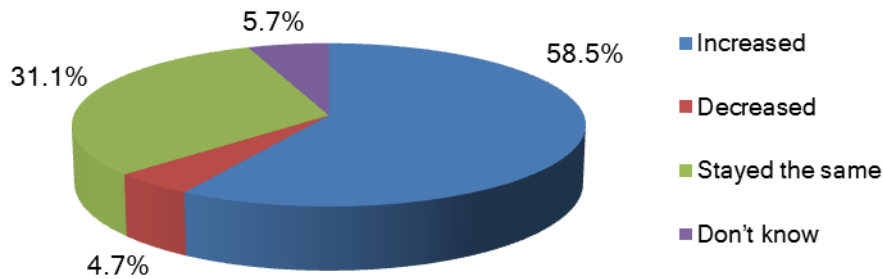
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CHAPTER 3:   PARTICIPATION LEVELS AND METHODS

The information in this chapter was sought from all respondents. However, questions were more relevant to those that currently include children and young people in decision-making or that have done so in the past.

3.1   LEVELS OF INVOLVEMENT

A total of 153 respondents answered this question (76.5% of total respondents) relating to the levels children and young people are involved in decision-making within the HSE and HSE-funded services. Involving children and young people in decisions relating to them as individuals was the most common type of involvement, which was reported by 93 respondents (60.8%). 68 respondents (44.4%) from the HSE and HSE-funded services involve children and young people in developing new policies and services; 59 (38.6%) involve children and young people in the delivery of services; 59 (38.6%) involve children and young people in monitoring or evaluating services and policies; 52 (34%) consult with children and young people on changing or developing existing policies and services; and 45 (29.4%) in identifying the policies and services that matter to children and young people. 24 respondents (15.7%) said they do not involve children and young people in decision-making on any level within their team, department, organisation or service (*see Table 2*).

TABLE 2: LEVELS OF INVOLVEMENT OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN DECISION-MAKING

Levels of involvement	%	No. of respondents
In decisions that are made about them as individuals (e.g. health matters, family issues, custody issues)	60.8%	93
Asking for their ideas when developing new policies and/or services	44.4%	68
In the delivery of services	38.6%	59
In monitoring or evaluating services and/or policies	38.6%	59
Asking about their ideas when changing or developing existing policies and/or services	34%	52
In identifying the policies and/or services that matter to children and young people	29.4%	45
Children and young people are not involved in decision-making on any level	15.7%	24
Don't know	2.6%	4

3.2   APPROACHES TO INVOLVING CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN DECISION-MAKING

Of the 155 that responded from the HSE and HSE-funded services (77.5% of total respondents), 80 (51.6%) stated that ongoing informal consultations with children and young people, and child- and youth-friendly literature are the most common approaches to involving children and young people in decision-making.

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60 (38.7%) conduct research into children and young people's views and needs; 53 (34.2%) carry out surveys of children and young people on particular issues; 39 (25.2%) conduct focus groups; 28 (18.1%) hold public meetings and events for children and young people; 25 (16.1%) use e-mail and text-messaging; 17 (11%) have interactive websites designed specifically for children and young people; and 12 (7.7%) have permanent youth councils and forums (*see Table 3*).

TABLE 3: APPROACHES TO INVOLVING CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN DECISION-MAKING

Approaches	%	No. of respondents
Ongoing informal consultation with children and young people	51.6%	80
Child- and youth-friendly literature	51.6%	80
Research into children and young people's views and needs	38.7%	60
Surveys of children and young people on particular issues	34.2%	53
Focus groups	25.2%	39
Other	18.7%	29
Public meetings and events for children and young people	18.1%	28
E-mail/text-messaging	16.1%	25
Interactive websites specifically for children and young people	11%	17
Permanent youth councils/forums	7.7%	12
None of the above	17.4%	27
Don't know	2.6%	4

A further 29 respondents (18.1%) gave details of other approaches they take to involve children and young people in decision-making within the HSE and HSE-funded services. Approaches included involving children and young people in care in the development and review of care and family plans, as well as providing advocacy to some children and young people to enable participation in decision-making concerning their own welfare and protection. Children and young people in care are also consulted during the inspection of residential centres.

Young people were involved in a national advisory group for the development of the B4UDecide Campaign, a programme by the Crisis Pregnancy Agency that aims to encourage teenagers to make healthy, responsible decisions about relationships and sex.

Other types of approaches include children and young people with mental health difficulties setting their own goals for counselling and the involvement of children and young people with intellectual disabilities in decision-making through designing specific questionnaires.

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CHAPTER 4:   REACHING CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

The information in this chapter was only sought from respondents from the HSE and HSE-funded services that currently include children and young people in decision-making or that have done so in the past. Therefore, it should be noted that percentages in this section relate to the number of respondents that have involved children and young people in decision-making rather than all respondents that answered the questionnaire.

4.1   PROFILE OF SERVICE USERS INVOLVED IN DECISION-MAKING

Teams and departments from the HSE, as well as the HSE-funded organisations and services, were asked which groups of children and young people they involve in decision-making in their services in terms of:

- age;
- gender;
- ethnicity;
- disability;
- settings;
- location;
- other.

4.2   AGE OF SERVICE USERS INVOLVED IN DECISION-MAKING

Of the 118 respondents from the HSE and HSE-funded services that responded to this question (59% of total respondents), 106 (89.8%) involve 16-17 year-olds in decision-making; 99 (83.9%) involve 13-15 year-olds; 59 (50%) involve 5-12 year-olds; and 21 (17.8%) involve 0-4 year-olds (*see Figure 10*).

FIGURE 10: AGE OF SERVICE USERS INVOLVED IN DECISION-MAKING

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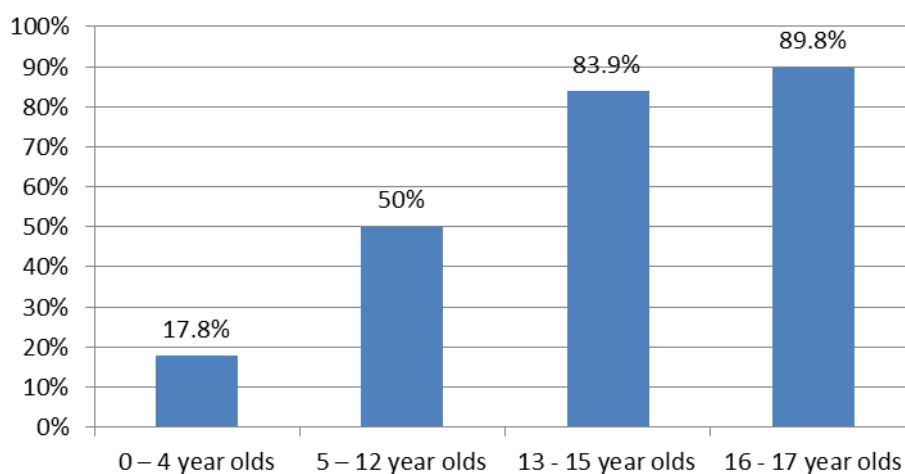
4.3   GENDER OF SERVICE USERS INVOLVED IN DECISION-MAKING

Out of the 119 respondents that answered this question (59.5% of total respondents), all 119 (100%) involve girls in decision-making and 115 (96.6%) involve boys.

4.4   ETHNICITY OF SERVICE USERS INVOLVED IN DECISION-MAKING

A total of 85 respondents from the HSE and HSE-funded services answered this question (42.5% of total respondents), of which 76 (89.4%) consult with young people from ethnic minorities in terms of decision-making, 75 (88.2%) consult with young Travellers and 60 (70.6%) consult with young refugees and asylum-seekers (*see Figure 11*). However, it should be noted that taken as a percentage of all respondents, 38% have involved young people from ethnic minorities in decision-making, 37.5% have involved young Travellers and 30% have involved young refugees and asylum-seekers.

FIGURE 11: ETHNICITY OF SERVICE USERS INVOLVED IN DECISION-MAKING
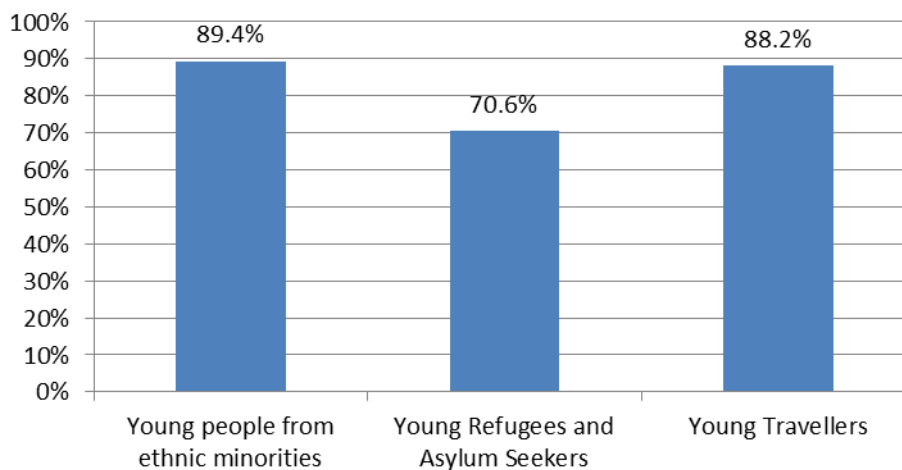
4.5   SERVICE USERS INVOLVED IN DECISION-MAKING WITH A DISABILITY

Out of the 72 respondents that answered this question (36% of total respondents), 65 (90.3%) have involved children and young people with learning difficulties in decision-making and 52 (72.2%) have involved children and young people with a physical or sensory disability. Overall, 32.5% of all respondents have involved children and young people with learning difficulties in decision-making and 26% have involved those with a physical or sensory disability.

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4.6   SERVICE USERS INVOLVED IN DECISION-MAKING IN CARE OR IN HOSPITAL

Of the 80 respondents that answered this question (40% of total respondents), 62 (77.5%) stated they have involved children and young people currently in foster or residential care in decision-making. Those formerly in foster care have been involved by 51 respondents (63.8%) and those formerly in residential care have been involved by 45 respondents (56.3%). Just 25 respondents (31.3%) from the HSE and HSE-funded services had involved children and young people in hospital in decision-making (*see Figure 12*).

Again, it should be noted that taken as a percentage of all respondents, 31% have involved children and young people currently in foster or residential care in decision-making, 25.5% have involved those formerly in foster care, 22.5% have involved those formerly in residential care and 12.5% have involved children and young people in hospital.

FIGURE 12: SERVICE USERS INVOLVED IN DECISION-MAKING IN CARE OR HOSPITAL
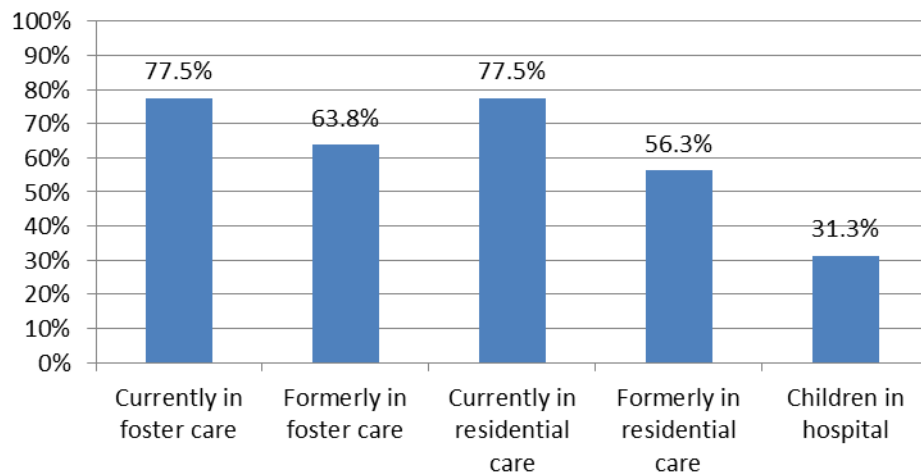
4.7   INVOLVEMENT OF URBAN AND RURAL BASED SERVICE USERS IN DECISION-MAKING

Of the 114 from the HSE and HSE-funded services that answered this question (57% of total respondents), 99 (86.8%) involve children and young people from urban areas in decision-making and 86 (75.4%) involve those from rural areas.

4.8   OTHER GROUPS INVOLVED IN DECISION-MAKING

From the 95 respondents that answered this question (47.5% of total respondents), 68 (71.6%) have involved early school-leavers in decision-making, 52 (54.7%) have involved young offenders and 50 (52.6%) have involved lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered (LGBT) young people (*see Figure 13*). However, it should be noted that as a percentage of all respondents, 34% have involved early school-leavers, 26% have involved young offenders and 25% have included LGBT young people.

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FIGURE 13: OTHER GROUPS INVOLVED IN DECISION-MAKING
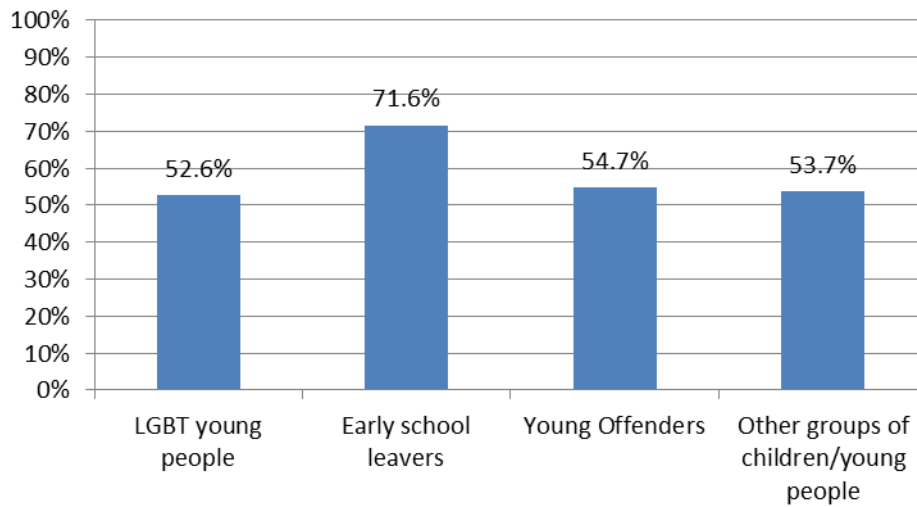
51 respondents (53.7%) from the HSE and HSE-funded services reported involving other groups of children and young people, which included those:

▪ at risk of coming into care;

▪ at risk of offending, e.g. from Garda Diversion Projects;

▪ who are homeless or have experienced homelessness;

▪ with complex needs;

▪ with substance misuse issues or family members who are drug users;

▪ over 18 years of age, in college and Youthreach;

▪ those with chronic illnesses and hospital users;

▪ with mental health difficulties;

▪ social, personal and health education (SPHE) students.

4.9   HARD-TO-REACH CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

Overall, 46 (43.4%) out of 106 respondents (53% of total respondents) from the HSE and HSE-funded services involved in participation activity stated that they find it difficult to reach specific groups of children and young people, while 60 (56.6%) do not. The main groups identified as being hard to reach were early school-leavers, young Travellers and ethnic minorities, refugees and asylum-seekers. Young men were another group highlighted as being hard to reach, alongside those misusing alcohol and drugs, and young offenders.

Other hard-to-reach groups included children and young people with mental health problems who refuse to engage with services, those with disabilities, those who are disadvantaged or marginalised, those who have left home or care, those in hospital, very young children, inactive teenage girls and those whose parents are not open to engaging with services.

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4.10 TARGETING HARD-TO-REACH CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

A total of 33 respondents said they have identified effective ways of targeting hard-to-reach children and young people. The most common approach reported was developing relationships and partnerships with organisations that work with target groups, such as local Traveller youth projects, drug treatment services and schools. Involving personnel who have built up a relationship of trust with the young person was also deemed to be very important.

Developing projects or activities targeted at specific groups of children and young people was another effective way for targeting hard-to-reach groups. For example, the 'Father Focus Project' was developed for young fathers in conjunction with the Crisis Pregnancy Agency. However, it was stated that keeping a balance between developing services that are inclusive and meeting the needs of specific target groups can be challenging:

- *'We have developed themed projects/activities that they may be interested in, which can attract them to get involved with us.'*

Developing facilities such as youth cafés, where hard-to-reach children and young people can feel comfortable and interact with youth services, was considered to be an effective way to target this group. Similarly, positioning services in a youth-friendly environment was judged to be effective, such as mental health services within a local youth centre:

- *'Develop youth cafés, a non-stigmatised and youth-friendly space where more young people's voices can be heard.'*

Targeting hard-to-reach groups of children and young people through various forms of communication was discussed. This included the use of text messages, phone calls, flyers, information and awareness-raising sessions, word of mouth and existing young service users. One HSE organisation targets lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered (LGBT) young people through Internet forum sites, such as Gay Pride, Gay Switchboard and Gay Press.

Effective ways of targeting hard-to-reach children and young people in hospital settings included providing visual prompts for them to give opinions in waiting rooms and giving space for them to make choices. Multi-agency training and information sharing sessions were considered to be effective in this area too.

Young people who have left care are another hard-to-reach group targeted by the HSE through ongoing contact and aftercare provided by residential centres.

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Consulting directly with hard-to-reach children and young people and asking them to outline their needs, as well as involving them in the planning stages of youth work and all consultative processes, works well for some HSE organisations. Finally, well-trained outreach workers often target hard-to-reach children and young people through cold contact in a variety of situations.

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CHAPTER 5:   IMPACT OF PARTICIPATION

The information in this chapter was only sought from respondents from the HSE and HSE-funded services that currently include children and young people in decision-making or that have done so in the past. Therefore, it should be noted that percentages in this section relate to the number of respondents that have involved children and young people in decision-making rather than all respondents that answered the survey.

5.1   INFLUENCE OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE ON DECISIONS

Respondents were asked how much influence they think children and young people have on decisions made by their department, team, organisation or service. Out of 138 respondents (69% of total respondents), 26 (18.8%) felt children and young people have a great deal of influence; 66 (47.8%) felt they have some influence in particular areas; 30 (21.7%) felt they have very little influence; 13 (9.4%) felt they have no influence at all; and 3 (2.2%) were unsure (*see Figure 14*).

FIGURE 14: INFLUENCE OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE ON DECISIONS WITHIN THE HSE
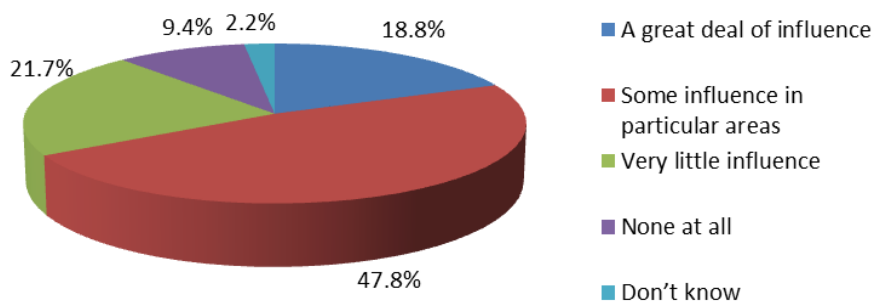
5.2   IMPACT OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S PARTICIPATION

In relation to the impact of children and young people's participation in the HSE and HSE-funded services, 74 (56.9%) out of 130 respondents (65% of total respondents) believe participation has influenced decisions about issues that affect children and young people directly; 52 (40%) believe it influenced the changing or development of existing policies and services; and 42 or almost one-third (32.3%) believe it influenced the development of new policies and services. However, 36 (27.7%) felt children and young people's participation did not have an impact in any of these areas (*see Table 4*).

TABLE 4: IMPACT OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S PARTICIPATION

Impact	%	No.
Influenced decisions about issues/matters which affect children and young people directly	56.9%	74
Influenced the changing or development of existing policies and/or services	40%	52
Influenced the development of a new policy and/or service	32.3%	42
None of the above	27.7%	36

EXAMPLES OF THE IMPACT OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S PARTICIPATION

Respondents from the HSE and HSE-funded services were asked to give examples of the impact of children and young people's participation in decision-making within their department, team or organisation. These included:

i.   CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN CARE

The most significant impact reported was in the area of children and young people in care. Those in care have a say in the type of place where they would like to live and its location, as well as in their day-to-day routines. Children and young people are also involved in every stage of their care plans, family support plans and family welfare conferences:

▪ *'Two families battling over adult issues were better able to focus on the needs of the children after the child shared their views with the family.'*

According to respondents, feedback from children and young people on family conferences has influenced the approach taken by the HSE in this service area. Similarly, feedback has impacted on how children in care reviews are conducted, for example, review forms have been made more child-friendly. Other HSE forms have also been made easier for children and young people to understand:

▪ *'Change of forms that children in care use to communicate their needs – following complaints by the children, we modified forms to make them more accessible to children and young people.'*

Other areas where children and young people in care have had an impact include aftercare planning, the policy on Variation Orders in Court, staff training in residential care, the complaints system and anti-bullying, healthy eating and residential policies.

ii.   POLICY DEVELOPMENT

Another key area where children and young people have had an impact is in policy development within the HSE and HSE-funded organisations, services and programmes. Policies that children and young people have had an input into include health promotion, healthy eating, sexual health, harm reduction, safe social networking and anti-bullying policies. In addition, lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered (LGBT) young people participated in research that impacted on development plans in

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Cos. Tipperary, Clare and Limerick in relation to service provision for young LGBT people in youth projects and schools:

- *'Young people are always consulted through Health Promoting Schools Committees on new health promotion policies.'*

iii. DEVELOPMENT AND RUNNING OF YOUTH SERVICES AND PROGRAMMES

Children and young people have had an impact on the development and running of youth services and programmes. They have been involved in the development of HSE-funded services such as youth cafés, youth groups for ethnic minorities, LGBT youth groups, teenage antenatal classes, young parents services and sexual health service for teenagers:

- *'A group of young people from ethnic minority groups set up their own youth club with the support of a HSE service following a planning seminar.'*

They have been involved in decision-making in relation to various aspects of youth services, such as the choice of premises, equipment, opening hours and the name of services. Young people are often represented on the Board of services, are involved in the design of business plans and strategies, and sometimes participate in staff interviewing processes.

Children and young people are regularly involved in needs analysis and the development of programmes and activities within services. HSE-funded programmes are often influenced by children and young people; for example, a number of students were involved in the resource development process of the SPHE programme in schools. Suggestions from young people involved in the Big Brother Big Sister School Mentoring Programme to set up youth committees are being considered for implementation at national level:

- *'Young people involved in the Big Brother Big Sister School Mentoring Programme in their school suggested setting up a youth committee in the school to assist in the operation of the programme. The committee was such a success that it is recommended to be replicated in BBBS school mentoring programmes nationally.'*

iv. HOSPITALS AND HEALTHCARE SETTINGS

Children and young people have had an impact on issues relating to hospitals and healthcare settings, such as consent, decisions around treatment, what type of anaesthetic they receive, developing care plans, choice of play and home therapy programmes, and the design of waiting rooms, wards and in-patient rooms. One respondent from the HSE believes involving children and young people in decision-making has resulted in a greater uptake in counselling appointments.

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v.   MENTAL HEALTH

In the area of mental health, young people have participated in the development of a mental health awareness campaign and a television advertisement. On the recommendation of young people, the HSE established an eating disorder group for children and young people and is currently planning a post-primary school-based mental health service.

vi.   OTHER

Children and young people are regularly consulted on the development of new literature within the HSE, such as information leaflets, brochures and flyers. They have also been involved in the development of youth-friendly versions of reports, such as the youth-friendly version of *Your Service, Your Say*, the guide to making comments and complaints.

5.3   ASSESSMENT OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S PARTICIPATION

In total, 106 respondents answered this question (54% of total respondents). The most common form of assessment of children and young people's participation within the HSE and HSE-funded services was monitoring, which was favoured by 61 respondents (56.5%). 36 (33.3%) favoured self-evaluation, 25 (23.1%) favoured formal evaluation, while 16 (14.8%) felt no assessment of children and young people's participation was needed (*see Figure 15*).

FIGURE 15: TYPES OF ASSESSMENT OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S PARTICIPATION

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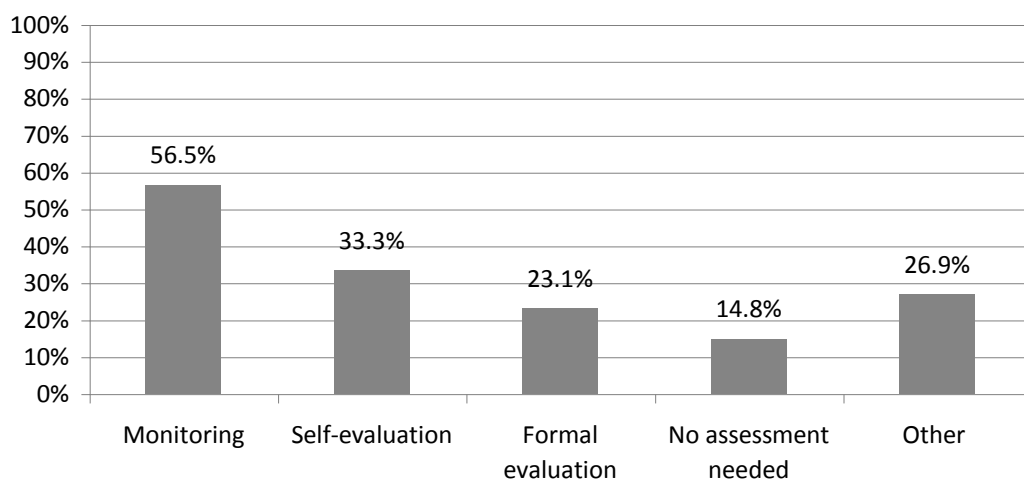
29 HSE teams, departments, organisations and services (26.9%) reported using other forms of assessment, including informal individual and group assessment, such as feedback from service users and general satisfaction levels. Children and young people's attendance records are also used as a measure of interest. In relation to HSE websites, the number of hits to websites, length of time and pages visited on websites, as well as feedback sections, are all used to measure children and young people's engagement with online services.

A number of respondents stated that they do not conduct assessments because the numbers of children and young people they involve in decision-making is so small. One organisation stated they have engaged in formal evaluations, but not on a systematic basis.

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CHAPTER 6:   SUPPORT FOR PARTICIPATION

The information in this chapter was sought from all respondents from the HSE and HSE-funded services. However, questions were more relevant to those that currently include children and young people in decision-making or that have done so in the past.

6.1   PARTICIPATION RESOURCES

There were 120 responses to this question (60% of total respondents). The most common type of resources the HSE and HSE-funded services allocated specifically to support children and young people's participation were:

- dedicated staff time (48.3%, 58 respondents);
- no resources specifically allocated to children and young people (44.2%, 53 respondents);
- use of premises/office space (27.5%, 33 respondents);
- transport and other expenses for children and young people (23.3%, 28 respondents);
- training and events costs (20.8%, 25 respondents);
- a separate funding stream/budget (15.8%, 19 respondents);
- dedicated administration time (15%, 18 respondents).

Other resources mentioned by 19 respondents (15.8%) included:

- IT equipment;
- team-building days;
- integrated care planning;
- multi-agency pooling of resources and information;
- provision and training of advocates;
- treats.

Some teams, departments and organisations often refer children and young people on to other services within the HSE, where resources are targeted more to their needs.

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TABLE 5: PARTICATION RESOURCES

Participation resources	No.	%	% of all respondents
Dedicated staff time	58	48.3%	29%
No resources specifically allocated to children and young people	53	44.2%	27%
Use of premises/office space	33	27.5%	16.5%
Transport and other expenses for children and young people	28	23.3%	14%
Training and events costs	25	20.8%	12.5%
A separate funding stream/budget	19	15.8%	9.5%
Other resources	19	15.8%	9.5%
Dedicated administration time	18	15%	9%

6.2   APPROACHES TO CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S PARTICIPATION

HSE departments, teams and organisations were asked to outline their approach to children and young people's participation. There were 122 responses to this question (61% of total respondents) and the most common to the least common approaches are outlined below:

- Our Department/Team/Organisation values the right of children and young people to be involved in decision-making (73.8%, 90 respondents).

- Our Department/Team/Organisation understands the practical implications of involving children and young people in decision-making (61.5%, 75 respondents).

- Children and young people's participation is integral to the work of our Department/Team/Organisation (49.2%, 60 respondents).

- Our services have improved as a result of children and young people's participation (41.8%, 51 respondents)

- Our Department/Team/Organisation always ensures that children and young people know about the results of their involvement (34.4%, 42 respondents).

- Our Department/Team/Organisation would like to involve children and young people more, but we don't have the resources (32%, 39 respondents).

- Our Department/Team/Organisation would like to involve children and young people more, but we don't know how to (10.7%, 13 respondents).

- Our Department/Team/Organisation has no need to involve children and young people in our decision-making processes (4.9%, 6 respondents).

- Our Department/Team/Organisation has no interest in involving children and young people in our decision-making processes (4.9%, 6 respondents).

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CHAPTER 7:   ATTITUDES AND PERCEPTIONS

The information in this chapter was sought from all respondents from the HSE and HSE-funded services.

7.1   ATTITUDES TO CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S PARTICIPATION

The survey respondents were asked to *'State the extent to which you agree or disagree with each of the following statements about decision-making'*, with the following outcomes:

- *'Children and young people have a right to be involved in public decision-making.'*

Out of 124 respondents (62% of total respondents), 47 (37.9%) strongly agreed with this statement, 58 (46.8%) agreed, one (0.8%) disagreed, 13 (10.5%) strongly disagreed and 5 (4%) were unsure (*see Figure 16*).

FIGURE 16: 'CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE HAVE A RIGHT TO BE INVOLVED IN PUBLIC DECISION-MAKING.'
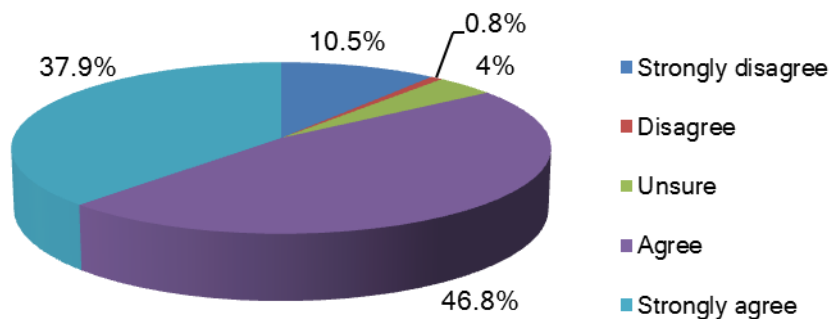
- *'Children and young people should only be involved in decision-making where there is clear evidence about the benefits of their involvement.'*

Out of 121 respondents that answered this question (60.5% of total respondents), 6 (5%) strongly agreed with this statement, 29 (24%) agreed, 48 (39.7%) disagreed, 14 (11.6%) strongly disagreed and 24 (19.8%) were unsure (*see Figure 17*).

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FIGURE 17: 'CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SHOULD ONLY BE INVOLVED IN DECISION-MAKING WHERE THERE IS CLEAR EVIDENCE ABOUT THE BENEFITS OF THEIR INVOLVEMENT.'
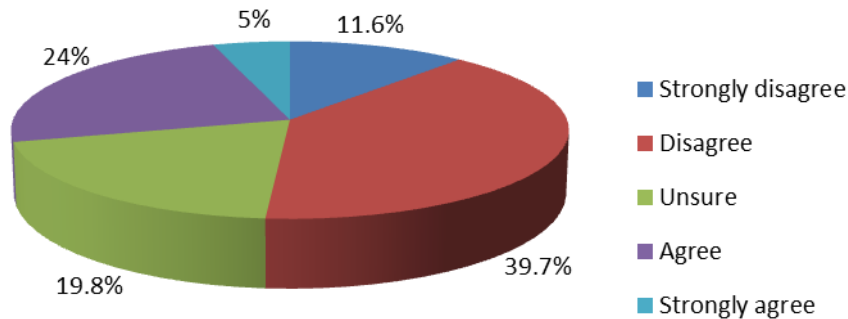
- *'It is too difficult to involve younger children in decision-making.'*

Overall, 123 respondents answered this question (61.5% of total respondents), of which 4 (3.3%) strongly agreed with the statement, 7 (5.7%) agreed, 17 (13.8%) were unsure, 65 (52.8%) disagreed and 30 (24.4%) strongly disagreed (*see Figure 18*).

FIGURE 18: 'IT IS TOO DIFFICULT TO INVOLVE YOUNGER CHILDREN IN DECISION-MAKING.'
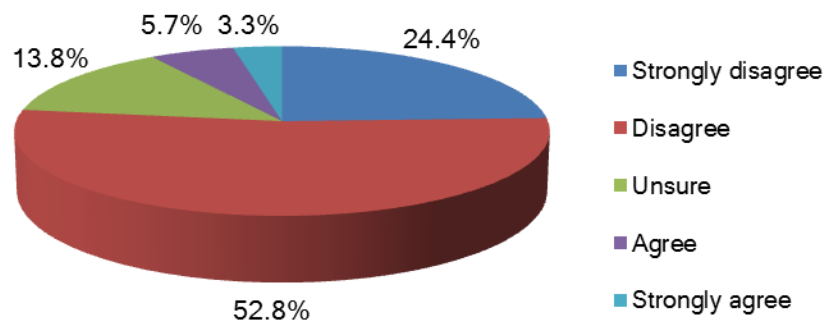
- *'There are no decisions which children and young people cannot be involved in, providing they are properly supported.'*

Of the 125 teams, departments and organisations from the HSE that responded (62.5% of total respondents), 25 (20%) strongly agreed, 47 (37.6%) agreed, 29 (23.2%) were unsure and 24 (19.2%) disagreed. No-one strongly disagreed with this statement (*see Figure 19*).

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FIGURE 19: 'THERE ARE NO DECISIONS WHICH CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE CANNOT BE INVOLVED IN, PROVIDING THEY ARE PROPERLY SUPPORTED.'
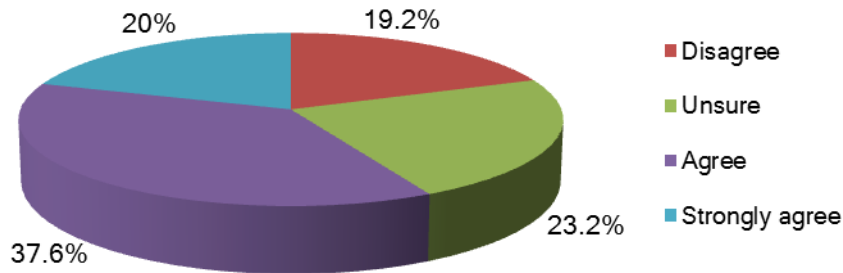
- *'There are some decisions which children and young people cannot be involved in.'*

A total of 124 respondents answered this question (62% of total respondents), of which 11 (8.9%) strongly agreed with the statement, 62 (50%) agreed, 33 (26.6%) were unsure, 14 (11.3%) disagreed and 4 (3.2%) strongly disagreed (*see Figure 20*).

FIGURE 20: 'THERE ARE SOME DECISIONS WHICH CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE CANNOT BE INVOLVED IN.'
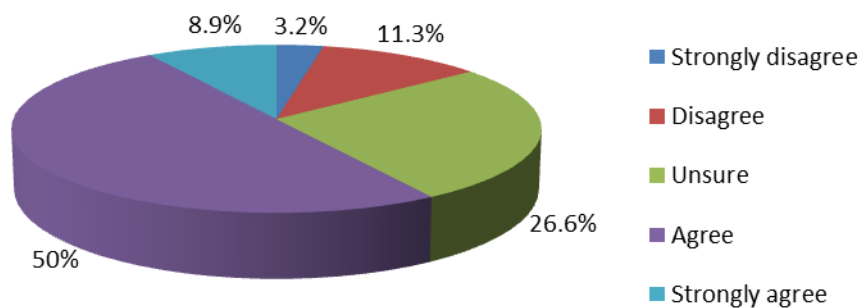
7.2   FURTHER ATTITUDES AND EXPERIENCES OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S PARTICIPATION

Respondents from the HSE and HSE-funded services were asked if there was anything they would like to highlight about their experience of or attitudes towards participation by children and young people in decision-making.

Many respondents highlighted their positive experiences of children and young people's participation. They described children and young people as an important resource that is vital for the success of every youth-focused organisation, project and programme. They believe children and young people can offer insight and experience which professionals cannot in terms of developing services and

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programmes. Involving children and young people in decision-making has also had a significant positive effect on the challenging behaviour of some children and young people involved in HSE services:

- *'We have greatly appreciated the insight and passion of young people, which has shaped the organisation we are today'.*

In order for children and young people's participation to be effective, it was outlined that organisations must be non-judgemental, committed to change at all levels, have a clear understanding of why they want to engage with children and young people, and ensure the correct structures and supports are in place to guarantee positive outcomes and experiences for those involved. The use of age-appropriate language and explanations of implications were also considered to be vital aspects of children and young people's participation:

- *'Young people's service provision needs to be designed based on the young people's needs – not on the perceived needs of young people – in order to ensure full participation of the young people in their service provision.'*

Respondents believe that children and young people should only be involved in decision-making where real changes are possible and children and young people's participation should never be tokenistic because it causes disillusionment. One respondent claimed that the HSE often pays 'lip service' to the right of children to be involved in decision-making that affects their lives:

- *'Too many reports and ideas on children and young people's participation are shelved, which disillusions children and young people.'*

Healthcare providers believe children appreciate being part of the decision-making process regarding their treatment and as a result understand the importance of their treatment better and are more likely to comply. However, one respondent argued that some health workers need to be more creative when working with children.

Mental health services for children and young people were highlighted as an area that is understaffed and does not have enough time to involve this group in participation structures. While mental health has consistently been identified by Dáil na nÓg as a key concern for children and young people, one respondent is disappointed by the HSE's response to the provision of such services. Consequently, they feel children and young people have been let down and stigmatised due to the lack of mental health services.

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In the opinion of one respondent, statutory processes, such as care planning and children in care reviews, are often seen as administrative tasks. They believe children are consulted because they have to be, not because there is a genuine interest in involving them in making decisions about their lives or considering their personal wishes. Another respondent stated that the perception that advocates are the best possible type of representation for younger children needs to be challenged and their inclusion in decision-making should be addressed.

One respondent from the HSE wanted to highlight the significant and successful work progressed at national level by Government to give direction and acknowledgement to children's right to participate. However, another respondent argued that children's rights need to be included in Irish legislation to ensure full participation of children and young people in decision-making structures in society:

- *'Until their rights are enshrined in the Constitution, it's difficult to get everyone on board with allowing children to participate in decisions that affect them.'*

One respondent from the HSE felt that children and young people do not need to be consulted on every aspect of an organisation, while another respondent emphasized the need for clear scientific evidence on the benefits of children and young people's involvement in decision making. Some HSE organisations are involved in promoting the participation of children and young people in their interactions with other organisations, which has often proved to be effective.

The temporary nature of some HSE services was highlighted as a difficulty in terms of engaging with children and young people in a meaningful way. One respondent stated that taking part in this study had highlighted for him the lack of involvement of children and young people in decision-making in his own organisation and would like assistance to enable them to do so.

Finally, there were calls for clearer participation structures to be put in place that would benefit both children and young people involved in decision-making and service providers such as the HSE:

- *'The next step to this progression is enabling children to engage in this process through a structure that is clear and gives an understanding to how their views and opinions translate into action.'*

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CHAPTER 8:   SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

Some of the key findings from this report can be categorised under the following headings:

PROFILE OF RESPONDENTS

The majority of respondents were from HSE Local Health Offices, followed by other HSE services, HSE-funded services and from hospital-based teams. There was a comparatively even spread of respondents from all four HSE areas, with the highest proportion being from Dublin Mid-Leinster.

AGE RANGE OF SERVICE USERS

HSE teams, departments, organisations and services most commonly work with and develop policies and services for young people aged 13-17 years.

USE OF HSE POLICIES AND GUIDELINES

Only a small number of respondents (15.8%) had ever used the HSE *National Strategy for Service User Involvement in the Irish Health Service* to help them involve children and young people in decision-making, while over half (56.9%) had received the HSE *Guidelines on Working with Children*.

INVOLVEMENT OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN DECISION-MAKING

Just over one-third of respondents (36.2%) from the HSE and HSE-funded services are currently involving children and young people in decision-making and almost one-quarter (19.9%) have done so in the past.

PARTICIPATION ACTIVITY

▪ **TYPE OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S PARTICIPATION**

82.5% of respondents from the HSE and HSE-funded services that involve children and young people in decision making are doing so on an ongoing basis.

▪ **KEY CONSULTATION ISSUES**

Mental and physical health, education, youth services, recreation and other issues relating to children and young people in care and healthcare services are the key issues the HSE and HSE-funded services consult with children and young people about.

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- **LENGTH OF TIME CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE INVOLVED IN DECISION-MAKING**

Over half of respondents (54.8%) engaged in participation activity have been involving children and young people in decision-making for the last 5 or more years. 58.5% of respondents involved in participation activity stated that there has been an increase in children and young people's participation within their department, team, organisation or service in the last 3 years, while almost one-third (31.1%) said it had remained the same.

PARTICIPATION LEVELS AND METHODS

- **LEVELS OF INVOLVEMENT**

The most common type of decisions the HSE and HSE-funded services involve children and young people in are those relating to them as individuals, such as healthcare and family issues.

- **APPROACHES TO INVOLVING CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN DECISION-MAKING**

Ongoing informal consultation, as well as providing child- and youth-friendly literature, is the approach the HSE and HSE-funded services generally take to involve children and young people in decision-making.

REACHING CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

- **PROFILE OF SERVICE USERS INVOLVED IN DECISION-MAKING**

The HSE and HSE-funded services most frequently involve teenagers rather than younger children in decision-making. The least consulted groups were children aged 0-4, followed by children and young people in hospital, those formerly in residential or foster care, lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered (LGBT) young people, young offenders, children and young people with a physical or sensory disability, children aged 5-12, young refugees and asylum-seekers, children and young people currently in residential or foster care, and children and young people with learning difficulties.

Children and young people with learning difficulties are less likely to be involved in decision-making than those with a physical or sensory disability. Similarly, those currently living in residential or foster care are more likely to be consulted that those formerly living in residential or foster care. More children and young people from urban areas are involved in decision-making by the HSE and HSE-funded services than those from rural areas. Children and young people from ethnic minorities, young Travellers and early school-leavers are the most consulted 'seldom-heard' young people.

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- **HARD-TO-REACH CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE**

Despite the findings just mentioned, early school-leavers, Travellers and ethnic minorities, refugees and asylum-seekers were identified by HSE respondents as the main groups of children and young people they find hardest to reach. Developing relationships and partnerships with organisations that work with specific target groups, as well as targeted projects and programmes, have proved to be the most successful ways to engage with hard-to-reach children and young people.

IMPACT OF PARTICIPATION

- **INFLUENCE OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE ON DECISIONS WITHIN THE HSE**

Respondents from the HSE involved in participation activity most commonly thought children and young people have some influence in particular areas on decisions made by their department, team, organisation or service. Respondents believe participation activity is more likely to influence decisions about issues that affect children and young people directly rather than the development of new or existing policies or services. Decisions children and young people are involved in were found to primarily have an influence at a local level.

- **IMPACT OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S PARTICIPATION**

The most noteworthy impact of involving children and young people in decision-making is in the area of residential and foster care, where participants have a say in their own care planning, as well as in family issues such as access and custody. Policy development and the development of youth services and programmes are other key areas where children and young people have had an impact.

- **ASSESSMENT OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S PARTICIPATION**

The most universal form of assessment of children and young people's participation among HSE respondents was monitoring, followed by self-evaluation, formal evaluation, informal assessments and attendance records.

SUPPORT FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S PARTICIPATION

- **PARTICIPATION RESOURCES**

Dedicated staff time was the most favoured type of resource that HSE teams, departments, organisations and services allocated specifically to support children and young people's participation. However, a large proportion of respondents stated that they had no resources specifically allocated to support children and young people's participation.

- **APPROACH TO CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S PARTICIPATION**

The preferred approach of respondents from the HSE and HSE-funded services to children and young people's participation was to value the right of children and young people to be involved in decision-making.

ATTITUDES AND PERCEPTIONS

Over 4 out of 5 of all respondents (84.7%) from the HSE and HSE-funded services 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' that children and young people have a right to be involved in public decision-making and 57.6% 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' that there are no decisions which children and young people cannot be involved in, providing they are properly supported. 58.9% of all respondents 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' that there are some decisions which children and young people cannot be involved in and just 9% 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' that it is too difficult to involve younger children in decision-making. 29% of all respondents thought that children and young people should only be involved in decision-making where there is clear evidence about the benefits of their involvement.

EXPERIENCES OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S PARTICIPATION

Respondents from the HSE and HSE-funded services that engaged in participation activity predominantly had positive experiences of involving children and young people in decision-making. According to respondents, children and young people's participation must have the correct supports and structures in place and not be tokenistic in order to be successful. However, mental health services were identified as a sector which should consult with younger service users more often. Concerns were expressed by a small number of respondents that involvement of children and young people in care in decision-making has become an administrative process rather than a meaningful consultative procedure.

A few respondents questioned whether children and young people should be included in decision-making at every level within the HSE and HSE-funded services and emphasized the need for evidence-based findings to support its benefits. While it was recognised that significant work has been done at Government level with regard to children and young people's participation, the formal inclusion of children's rights in the Constitution of Ireland was called for.

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CHAPTER 9:   KEY MESSAGES

There are a number of key messages resulting from this audit of children and young people's participation in the HSE and HSE-funded services.

The survey revealed that just 15.8% of all respondents had used the HSE *National Strategy for Service User Involvement in the Irish Health Service* to help them involve children and young people in decision-making and only 56.9% of respondents had received the HSE *Guidelines on Working with Children*.

In terms of actual participation levels, just over one-third of all respondents (36.2%) from the HSE and HSE-funded services are currently involving children and young people in decision-making. Another 19.9% has included children and young people in decision-making in the past and 13% plan to do so in the future.

Of the respondents from the HSE and HSE-funded services that have involved children and young people in decision-making (56.1% of total respondents), 82.5% are doing so on an ongoing basis and well over half (58.5%) reported an increase in participation activity in the last 3 years. Two-thirds of respondents (66.6%) involved in participation activity believe children and young people have a 'great deal' or 'some' influence on decisions made.

Respondents that have involved children and young people in decision-making generally reported positive experiences and benefits not only for the service users involved, but also for their service as a whole. However, at present, resources dedicated to participation activity, such as dedicated staff or funding, are relatively low, with a large proportion of those involved in participation having no resources specifically allocated to children and young people.

The study found that the involvement of children and young people in decision-making within the HSE and HSE-funded services is typically informal and most commonly related to decisions concerning children and young people as individuals within specific services, e.g. children and young people in care. Respondents also believe that children and young people have had the greatest impact in terms of influencing decisions that affect them directly as individuals.

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While mental health is the issue on which the HSE and HSE-funded services most frequently consult with children and young people, it was also identified by respondents as an area where children and young people should have a greater involvement in decision-making structures.

A number of HSE services, organisations, departments and teams have included socially excluded or 'seldom-heard' children and young people in decision-making. However, the study found that certain groups are more likely to be consulted than others. Early school-leavers, young Travellers and ethnic minorities were perceived by respondents to be the hardest groups to reach, but were among the most consulted cohorts.

The least consulted groups were children under 12 years of age, children and young people in hospital, those currently or formerly in residential or foster care, lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered (LGBT) young people, young offenders, children and young people with a physical or sensory disability or a learning difficulty, and young refugees and asylum-seekers.

Finally, 73.8% of all respondents from the HSE and HSE-funded services value the right of children and young people to be involved in decision-making and 84.7% 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' that children and young people have a right to be involved in public decision-making.

SURVEY OF STUDENT COUNCILS

This section of the report is an audit of children and young people's participation in decision-making in Student Councils.

CONTENTS

OVERVIEW

INTRODUCTION

This section of the report details the findings of a survey of Student Councils in secondary schools in Ireland. The survey was aimed at all secondary schools in the country with the purpose of examining Student Councils' involvement in participation activity within school structures.

METHODOLOGY

A pilot study was first conducted with four schools, in Dublin, Wicklow, Offaly and Cork. Two of the schools were visited by the Researcher and students were consulted in person about the questionnaire. Students who took part in the pilot study were asked to give feedback on the questionnaire and their recommendations were used to improve it. Key recommendations given by students were in relation to the length, language and format of the questionnaire.

A cover letter, a hard copy of the questionnaire and a link to an online version were sent to every Student Council in the country. Student Council members were instructed to discuss and complete the questionnaire together and then to fill in one single online version.

The first wave of the study commenced in May 2010 and ended in June 2010. There were a total of 135 responses to the first wave of the survey from Student Council members in 114 schools. Since there are over 700 secondary schools in the country, this was considered to be a low response rate and not representative of all secondary schools. Therefore, it was decided that the survey should be re-issued to schools that did not take part in the first wave to achieve a higher response rate.

The second wave of the study began in November 2010 and finished in December 2010. Again, there was a very low response rate, with 42 additional responses. This was partly due to the closure of many schools at the time due to bad weather. It was decided that a third and final wave would be undertaken to improve the response rate.

The third wave took place between January and February 2011. However, this time the questionnaire and cover letter were addressed to School Principals instead of Student Council Liaison Teachers, as was done for the first two waves. The National Association of Principals and Deputy Principals (NAPD) supported the dissemination of the questionnaire and co-signed the cover letter with the DCYA, urging Principals to promote participation in the study among their Student Councils. There were an additional 88 responses to the survey in the third wave, bringing the total number of responses to 270 Student Council members from 208 Student Councils. Therefore, only 208 schools responded from a total of 730 second-levels schools, which represented a response rate of 28.5%.

This low response rate was disappointing. However, there are perhaps some conclusions to be drawn from it. The questionnaire and cover letter for the first two waves of the study were addressed to the Student Council Liaison Teacher. It is possible that they were not in place in all schools and thus the letter may never have reached some Student Councils. It is also possible that the Liaison Teacher did not pass the questionnaire on to their Student Council, although this is less likely. Other possibilities include lack of time, organisation or interest in completing the questionnaire among Student Councils and Liaison Teachers.

Although the cover letter for the survey specified that each Student Council should submit one collective response, 21 Student Councils submitted more than one response. In total, 270 Student Council members from 208 Student Councils responded to the survey. Just one response from each of the 208 Student Councils that responded was analysed. Therefore, the first response from each school was included in the study. However, open-ended responses from all 270 respondents were analysed because they contained important information and examples that were relevant to the Student Councils that responded. A copy of the Student Council questionnaire can be found in Appendix C and the schools that responded are listed by county in Appendix E.

CHAPTER 1:   PROFILE OF SCHOOLS AND STUDENT COUNCILS

As mentioned in the 'Methodology' section of the Overview chapter, there were 270 responses to the survey from Student Council members from 208 Student Councils. Although 21 Student Councils submitted several responses to the questionnaire, only one response from each of the 208 Student Councils was analysed for the purpose of the study.

1.1   GEOGRAPHIC LOCATION OF SCHOOLS

Overall, almost half or 99 of the Student Councils that responded (48%) were from schools in Leinster; 67 (32%) were from schools in Munster; 26 (12%) were from schools in Connacht; and 16 (8%) were from schools in Ulster (*see Figure 1*).

FIGURE 1: GEOGRAPHICAL LOCATION OF SCHOOLS
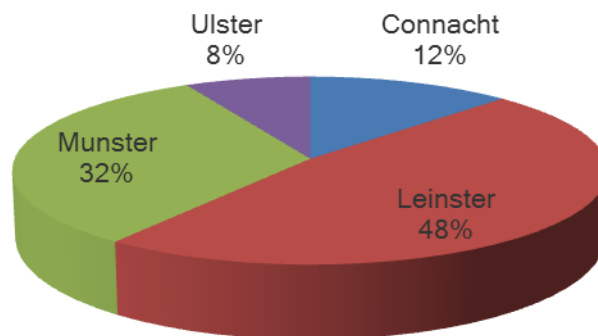
There was a good geographical spread of schools that responded from across Ireland, with the highest number of schools from Dublin and Cork (*see Table 1*). Almost two-thirds of Student Councils (65%) were from schools in urban areas and over one-third (35%) were from schools in rural areas.

TABLE 1: RESPONDING SCHOOLS, BY COUNTY

County	No. of respondents	%
Carlow	1	0.5%
Cavan	2	1%
Clare	4	2%
Cork	31	15%
Donegal	10	5%
Dublin	47	22.5%
Galway	11	5%
Kerry	9	4%
Kildare	9	4%
Kilkenny	5	2.5%
Laois	1	0.5%
Limerick	11	5%
Longford	4	2%
Louth	5	2.5%
Mayo	9	4%
Meath	8	4%
Monaghan	3	1.5%
Offaly	1	0.5%
Roscommon	2	1%
Sligo	3	1.5%
Tipperary	8	4%
Waterford	4	2%
Westmeath	6	3%
Wexford	4	2%
Wicklow	10	5%
Total	**208**	**100%**

1.2   TYPE OF SCHOOL

129 Student Councils (62%) were from co-educational schools, 51 (24.5%) were from all-girls schools and 28 (13.5%) were from all-boys schools *(see Figure 2)*.

FIGURE 2: TYPE OF SCHOOL
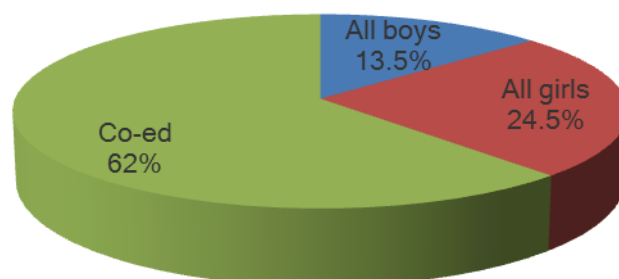
1.3   SIZE OF STUDENT COUNCILS

In terms of size, the largest number of Student Councils (28%) had more than 20 members. The lowest number of Student Council members was 5 (0.5%) (*see Table* 2).

TABLE 2: NO. OF STUDENT COUNCIL MEMBERS PER STUDENT COUNCIL

No. of Student Council members	No. of respondents	%
5	1	0.5%
6	0	0.0%
7	1	0.5%
8	5	2.5%
9	3	1.5%
10	16	8%
11	3	1.5%
12	35	17%
13	10	5%
14	19	9%
15	12	6%
16	11	5%
17	9	4%
18	9	4%
19	8	4%
20	7	3%
20+	58	28%
Unanswered	1	0.5%
Total	**208**	**100%**

1.4   AGE PROFILE

The youngest age of a Student Council member was 11 and the oldest age was 20.

1.5   SCHOOL YEAR REPRESENTATION

The strongest representation on Student Councils were from 5th years (97%), followed by 6th years (94%), 3rd years (93%), 2nd years (93%), 1st years (86%) and Transition Year (TY) students (81%) (*see Figure 3*).

FIGURE 3: SCHOOL YEAR OF STUDENT COUNCIL MEMBERS
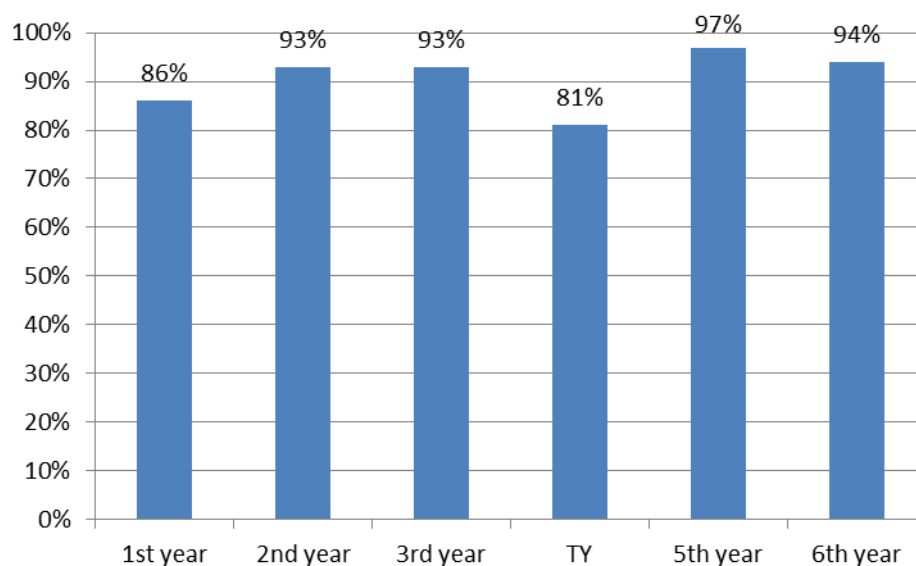
1.6 LENGTH IN EXISTENCE

Respondents were asked how long their Student Council had been in existence. 28% of respondents said their Student Council was in existence for more than 10 years; 12% for 6 years; 9% for 10 years; 7% for 5 years; 7% for 4 years; 7% for 3 years; 6% for 8 years; 3% for 7 years; 3% for one year; 2% for 9 years; and 2% for 2 years. 14% of respondents did not know how long the Student Council in their school was in existence (*see Table 3*).

TABLE 3: NO. OF YEARS STUDENT COUNCIL IN EXISTENCE

No. of years	No. of respondents	%
1	6	3%
2	4	2%
3	14	7%
4	15	7%
5	15	7%
6	24	12%
7	7	3%
8	12	6%
9	4	2%
10	18	9%
10+	59	28%
Don't know	30	14%
Total	**208**	**100%**

CHAPTER 2:   HOW STUDENT COUNCILS WORK

2.1   HOW STUDENTS GET INVOLVED

Respondents were asked how young people get involved in Student Councils in their schools. The great majority of Student Councils (93%) said their members were elected by fellow-students, 5% of their members were picked by teachers or Principals, and 10% reported other ways of getting involved in Student Councils (*see Figure 4*).

FIGURE 4: HOW YOUNG PEOPLE GET INVOLVED IN STUDENT COUNCILS
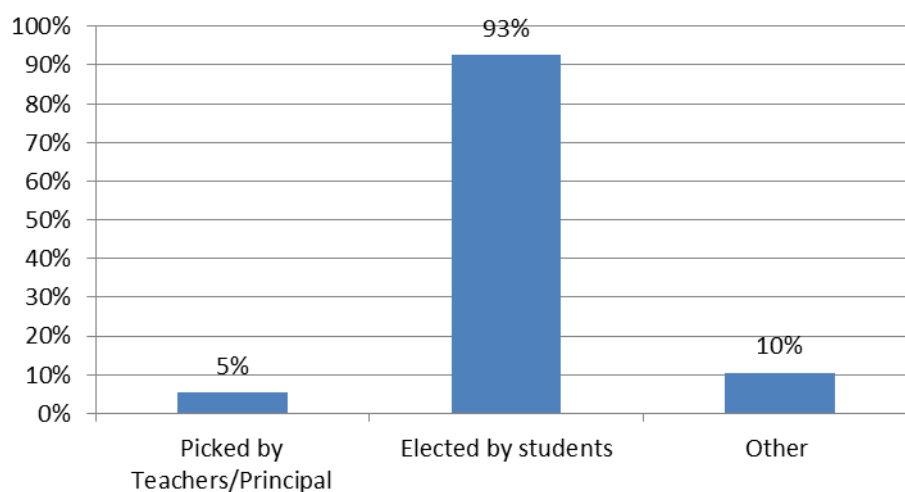
Other ways of getting involved in Student Councils or restrictions which apply are outlined below:

- students volunteer to become members of the Student Council;
- Student Council members are self-nominated, but in some cases have to fill out a nomination form, which must be signed by two proposers, and are then voted for by students from each year;
- students apply in writing for the position;
- students undergo an interview process to become a member of the Student Council;
- a core group of students are kept on each year on the Student Council;
- Student Council members appoint new Student Council members;
- Student Council members are elected from members of a 'mentor programme';
- prefects are elected as Student Council members;
- students are nominated by teachers and then an election is held;
- students apply to become Student Council members and are then chosen by teachers;
- students must seek nominations from two students in their year and from two teachers to become a candidate in the elections;
- Senior Cycle class representatives get onto the Student Council and a boy and girl from each year are elected by a teacher from the student representatives at Junior Cycle;
- prior to elections, a nominations lists is presented to staff for consultation so that student records can be checked;
- one school has a policy that if a student is extremely interested in joining the Student Council but was not elected by their group, they may apply to the Council to be permitted to join;
- in one school, only 4th, 5th and 6th years are allowed apply to be members of the Student Council;
- the Chairperson is elected by the previous year's Student Council from among 5th year students.

2.2   HOW OFTEN STUDENT COUNCILS MEET

Student Councils were asked how often they meet. 30% meet once a month; 26% meet once a week; 25% meet once every two weeks; 12% meet every 3 weeks; and 4% meet once every few months (*see Table 4*).

TABLE 4: HOW OFTEN STUDENT COUNCILS MEET

How often Student Councils meet	No. of respondents	%
Never	0	0%
Once every few months	9	4%
Once a month	62	30%
Once every three weeks	25	12%
Once every two weeks	52	25%
Once a week	54	26%
More than once a week	0	0%
Unanswered	6	3%
Total	208	100%

2.3   ATTENDEES AT STUDENT COUNCIL MEETINGS

Respondents were asked who usually attends Student Council meetings in their school. As well as Student Council members, almost all respondents (97%) said the Student Council Liaison Teacher usually attends meetings; 31% said their School Principal usually attends; 13% said other teachers usually attend; and 15% said 'others' usually attend (*see list below*). Only 4% said that other students usually attend (*see Figure 5*).

Others who occasionally attended Student Council meetings include:

- Deputy School Principal;
- School Chaplain;
- Student Welfare Officer;
- Special Needs Assistants;
- Members of Parents' Council/Association;
- Board of Management members;
- Green Flag Committee President;
- Head of Boarding (in a boarding school);
- School caretaking staff;
- Guests.

FIGURE 5: USUAL ATTENDEES AT STUDENT COUNCIL MEETINGS
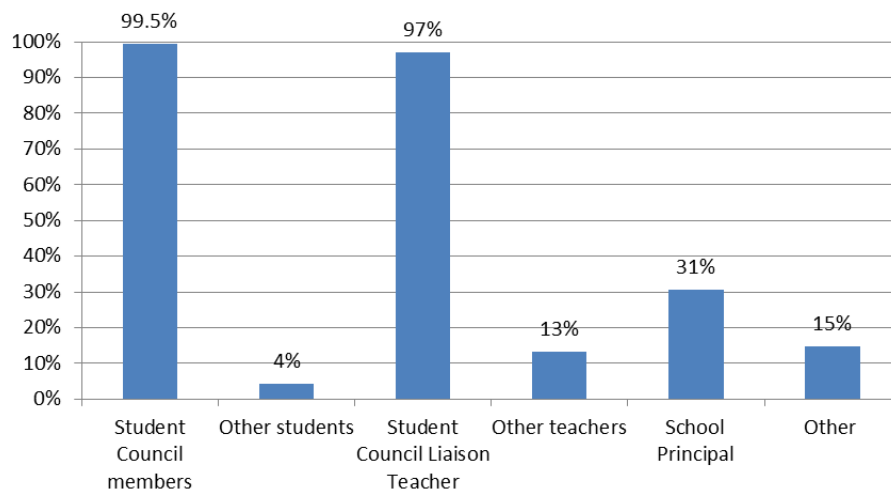
2.4 WHO CHAIRS STUDENT COUNCIL MEETINGS

Student Councils were asked who usually chairs their meetings. The majority (83%) said the Student Council Chairperson (who is a Student Council member) usually chairs meetings; 11% said the Student Council Liaison Teacher; 3.5% said other people such as the head boy or girl; 2% said other Student Council members; and 0.5% said the School Principal (*see Figure 6*). A number of respondents stated that the chairing of Student Council meetings is rotated between the Student Council Chairperson, the Student Council Liaison Teacher, other Student Council members and the School Principal.

FIGURE 6: USUAL CHAIRPERSON OF STUDENT COUNCIL MEETINGS
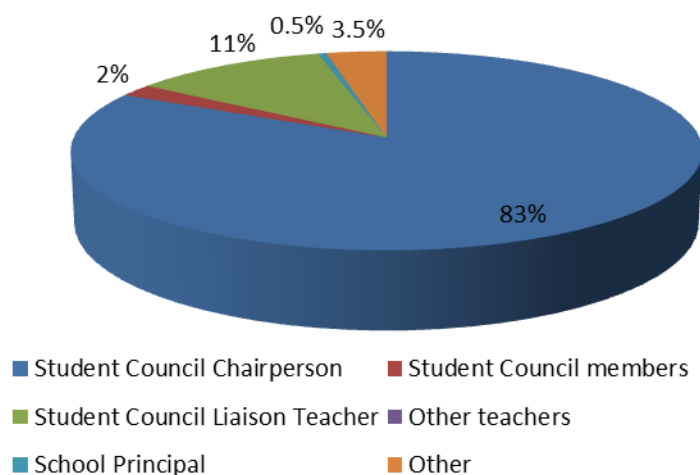
CHAPTER 3:   ROLE AND ACTIVITIES OF STUDENT COUNCILS

3.1   MAIN ROLES OF STUDENT COUNCIL

Respondents were asked what they consider to be the main roles of their Student Council. The highest number of respondents (96%) considered their main role to be '*to make sure students have a say*'; followed by '*to make your school a better place to be in*' (86%); '*to raise awareness on important issues*' (75%); '*to have a say in school policies/rules*' (75%); '*to help other students*' (73%);'*to organise and help with school events*' (69%); '*to consult with school management*' (58%); and '*to help with the smooth running of your school*' (45%) (*see Table 5*).

TABLE 5: MAIN ROLES OF STUDENT COUNCIL

Role	No. of respondents	%
To make sure students have a say	193	96%
To make your school a better place to be in	174	86%
To raise awareness on important issues	151	75%
To have a say in school policies/rules	151	75%
To help other students	148	73%
To organise and help with school events	176	69%
To consult with school management	117	58%
To help with the smooth running of your school	90	45%
Other	12	6%

Other roles that Student Councils considered to be important included:

- to raise funds for charities;
- to provide a link between students and management/staff;
- to update the Student Council noticeboard;
- to help out at Parent/Teacher meetings;
- to help out at sports events;
- to work with the entire school community and local community;
- to run the 'lost and found'.

3.2   WHO DECIDES STUDENT COUNCIL ACTIVITIES?

Respondents were asked if their Student Council decides on its own activities. The majority of Student Councils (60%) always decide on their own activities, 39% sometimes do and 1% rarely do (*see Figure 7*).

FIGURE 7: STUDENT COUNCILS DECIDE ON THEIR OWN ACTIVITIES
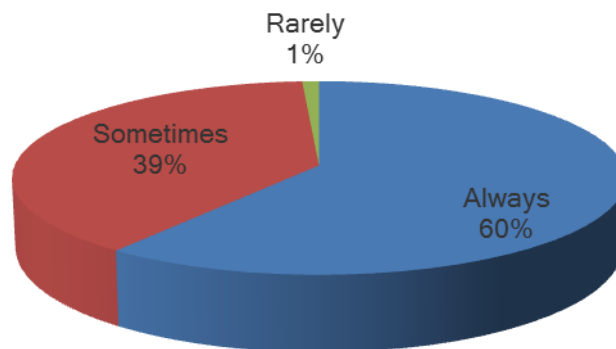
3.3   INVOLVEMENT IN COMMUNITY ACTIVITIES

Respondents were asked if their Student Council was involved in activities in their local community, such as voluntary work or fund-raising. Overall, 53% reported involvement in community activities, whereas 47% did not.

i.   FUND-RAISING

Of those Student Councils that reported involvement in community activities, 8 out of 10 had conducted fund-raising for local, national and international charities, or for their own school.

ii.   VOLUNTARY WORK

Many Student Councils had engaged in voluntary work, such as working in local sheltered housing, organising Christmas parties for senior citizens in local day-care centres and nursing homes, and entertaining people with intellectual difficulties in a local day-care centre. Some Student Councils were involved in the Tidy Towns competition in their local area and others were involved in voluntary recycling and environmental initiatives within their communities. A number of respondents participated in Gaisce – The President's Awards.

iii.   INVOLVEMENT IN COMMITTEES

Student Council members also reported involvement in committees such as Comhairle na nÓg, Dáil na nÓg, Junior County Councils and local youth café committees.

iv.   INVOLVEMENT WITH LOCAL GOVERNMENT

One Student Council was involved with their local County Council in organising a traffic management system, while another took part in a conference concerning transport issues for young people in their county. A third Student Council was consulted in relation to a Consultative Plan for their county VEC.

3.4 REPRESENTATION ON OTHER COMMITTEES

Respondents were asked if their Student Council had ever been represented on other school committees. 37% of respondents stated their Student Councils had been represented on other school committees, while 63% stated they had not.

Committees that Student Councils were represented on included the following:

- Board of Management Committees
- Parents Association Committees
- Parent/Teacher Associations
- Management Advisory Committees
- Student Government Committees
- Uniform Committees
- School Policy/Rules Committees
- Board of Discipline
- Health Promoting Schools Committees
- Healthy eating/Food/Canteen Committees
- Anti-bullying Committees
- Autistic Spectrum Disorder Unit Committee
- Green Schools Committee
- Intercultural Committees
- Coiste Gaeilge
- Sports/Games Committees
- Active Schools Committees
- Mentor/Prefect Committees
- Graduation/Special Event/Celebration Committees
- Change of School Name Committees
- School Opening Committees
- Local Parish Council

CHAPTER 4:   RELATIONSHIPS AND COMMUNICATION WITH OTHERS

4.1   RELATIONSHIPS WITH PRINCIPALS, TEACHERS AND STUDENTS

Student Councils were asked about their relationship with School Principals, teachers and other students in their school (*see Figure 8*). Half of all Student Councils (50%) described their relationship with their School Principal as excellent; 32% as very good; 15% as good; 2.5% as fair; and 0.5% as poor. 38% of Student Councils described their relationship with teachers as excellent; 31% as very good; 26% as good; 4.5% as fair; and 0.5% as poor. One-third of Student Councils (33%) described their relationship with other students as excellent; 35.5% as very good; 25% as good; 6% as fair; and 0.5% as poor.

FIGURE 8: STUDENT COUNCIL RELATIONSHIP WITH PRINCIPAL, TEACHERS AND STUDENTS
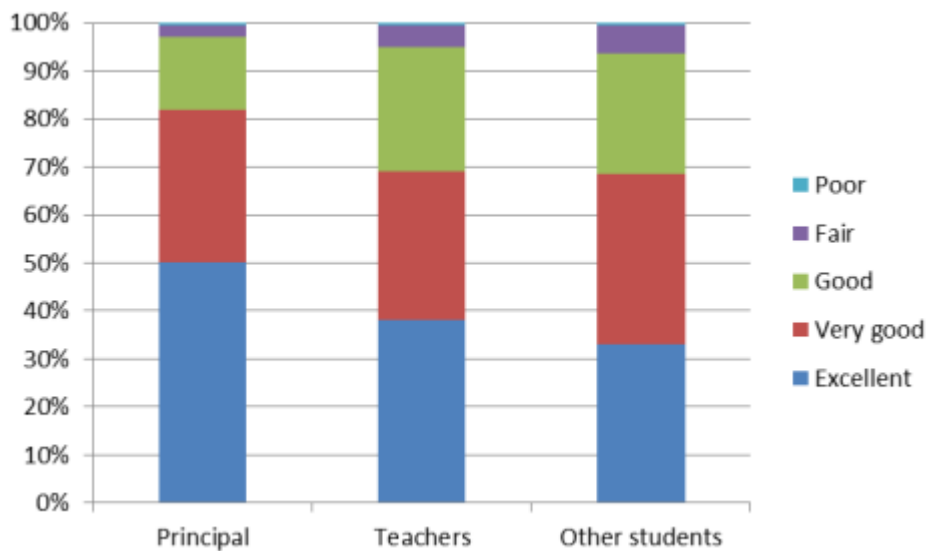
4.2 CONSULTATION WITH OTHER STUDENTS

Student Councils were asked if they consult with other students in their school on important issues. 60% of Student Councils always consult with other students, 36% sometimes do and 4% rarely do (*see Figure 9*). No Student Councils said they never consult with other students on important issues.

FIGURE 9: STUDENT COUNCIL CONSULTATION WITH OTHER STUDENTS ON IMPORTANT ISSUES
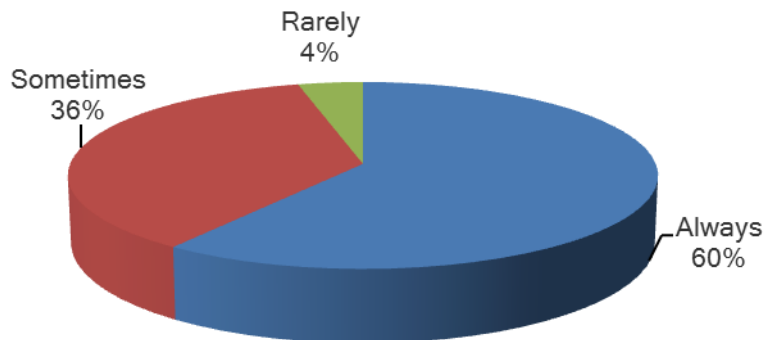
4.3 ACTIVITIES WITH OTHER STUDENTS

Student Councils were asked about their activities involving other students in their school. 83% report to classes as student representatives; 69% update their noticeboard regularly; 67% invite students to submit ideas to their Student Council; 64% survey students to get their opinions; 33% form sub-committees; and 27% invite students to meetings to present ideas (*see Table 6*).

TABLE 6: STUDENT COUNCIL ACTIVITIES WITH OTHER STUDENTS

Activities	No. of respondents	%
Report to classes as student representatives	167	83%
Update noticeboard regularly	138	69%
Invite students to submit ideas to the Student Council	135	67%
Survey students to get their opinions	129	64%
Form sub-committees	67	33%
Invite students to meetings to present ideas	55	27%

CHAPTER 5:   INVOLVEMENT IN DECISION-MAKING

5.1   MAKING DECISIONS WITH SCHOOL MANAGEMENT

Student Councils were asked about their involvement in decision-making with school management. 9% of Student Councils are always involved in decision-making with school management; 68% are sometimes involved; 16% are rarely involved; and 7% are never involved (*see Figure 12*).

FIGURE 12: STUDENT COUNCIL INVOLVED IN DECISION-MAKING WITH SCHOOL MANAGEMENT
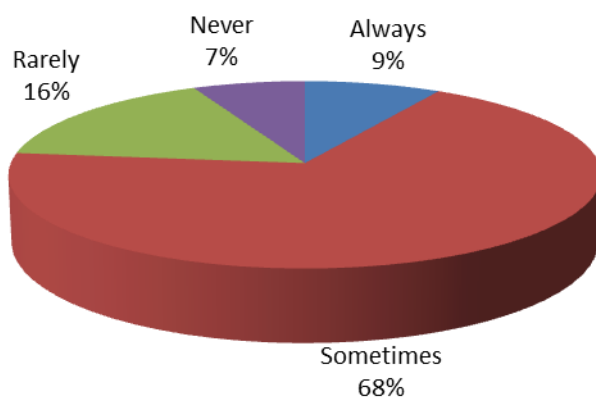
5.2   EXAMPLES OF DECISION-MAKING

Respondents were asked to give examples of their Student Council's involvement in decision-making with school management. Examples included:

i.   SCHOOL POLICIES

Student Councils were most regularly consulted or involved in decision-making in relation to school policies. Students were consulted on policies relating to uniforms, homework, anti-bullying, healthy eating, substance misuse, mobile phones, computers, make-up, lockers, health and safety, lunchtime, school tours, litter, bereavement, student support, Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE), religion and equality.

- *'The Student Council has a major input into the compiling and updating of school policies, such as the homework policy, etc.'*

- *'We are always consulted on issues when it pertains to student affairs, such as uniform policy, constitution, etc.'*

ii. SCHOOL RULES

Student Councils reported frequent involvement in decision-making with school management in relation to school rules, such as the Code of Behaviour, as well as student privileges and sanctions. Some Student Councils were consulted on the writing of their school's constitution and mission statement, as well as their Student Council constitution.

- *'We are currently involved in the redevelopment of the school's Code of Behaviour.'*

iii. SCHOOL FACILITIES AND EQUIPMENT

Student Councils were often consulted by school management on the development or improvement of school facilities, such as classrooms, libraries, canteens, toilets, gardens, yards and social areas. Similarly, some Student Councils were consulted when schools purchased new equipment, such as televisions, lockers, vending machines, bins and water systems.

iv. HOW SCHOOLS OPERATE

A number of Student Councils have had an impact on how their school operates, for example, introducing prefect systems, teacher-based classrooms, how often assemblies are held, exam timetables, length of break times and school hours.

- *'We recently changed from form-based classrooms to teacher-based classrooms. We surveyed pupils on what they thought of the change and reported our findings to the school management.'*

v. DESIGN OF UNIFORMS

Student Councils were commonly involved in decision-making relating to the design of school uniforms, tracksuits and PE gear, school diaries/journals, lunch menus and school signage.

- *'We were involved in designing the new school jacket and the design of the school garden.'*

vi. SCHOOL EVENTS AND CAMPAIGNS

Student Council members were included in decision-making concerning school events, such as sports days, non-uniform days and graduation balls. They were consulted on the organisation of awareness campaigns within schools, such as anti-bullying, mental health, anti-litter, environmental and healthy eating awareness campaigns.

- *'Anti-bullying campaign, changing the uniform, getting rid of the bins campaign (students were encouraged to bring home their own rubbish).'*

vii. OTHER ISSUES

Student Councils have been consulted on other issues by school management, such as student welfare, theft and Parent/Teacher meetings. Students are frequently consulted on practical issues as they arise and ideas and initiatives schools may have.

- *'6th years being allowed to sit in on Parent/Teacher meetings.'*

viii.   CONSULTION METHODS

The majority of Student Councils consult with school management on an ongoing basis through Student Council meetings. One Student Council shares all information discussed at their meetings with school management. Another Student Council reported that their Liaison Teacher acts as a contact between them and school management in relation to decision-making. The Student Council in one school is invited to 'staff days' where they are involved in decision-making alongside teachers and school management on various issues.

5.3   ARE STUDENT COUNCIL VIEWS TAKEN SERIOUSLY?

Student Councils were asked if their views were taken seriously by school management. Overall, 57% felt their views were always taken seriously by school management; 38% felt they sometimes were; 4% felt they rarely were; and just 1% felt they never were (*see Figure 10*).

FIGURE 10: STUDENT COUNCIL VIEWS ARE TAKEN SERIOUSLY BY SCHOOL MANAGEMENT
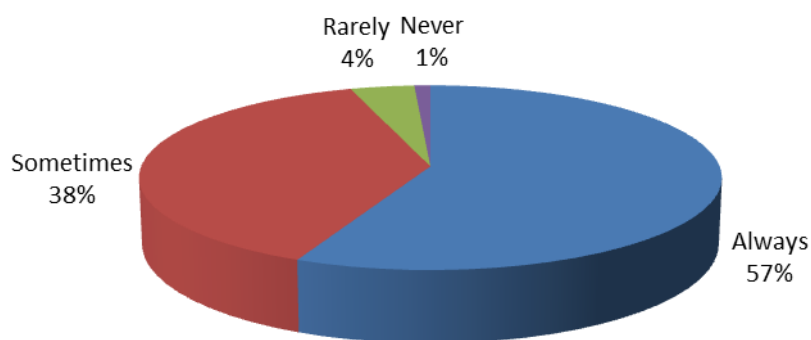
5.4   EXAMPLES OF VIEWS BEING TAKEN SERIOUSLY

Respondents were asked to give examples of how the views of their Student Council were taken seriously by school management. Examples can be classified in relation to the following areas:

i.   SCHOOL MANAGEMENT LISTENS TO STUDENT COUNCILS

Many respondents felt that they were taken seriously because school management listened to their Student Council and appreciated their views. The fact that school management listened was very important to respondents, even if they did not implement their ideas. However, respondents stated that reasonable and realistic requests and recommendations were usually taken seriously by management. Respondents believe that school managements generally consider Student Councils to be a representative voice of all students in their school who should be listened to.

- *'The management listens to everything the Student Council has to say and takes all of our ideas on board.'*

- *'When the Student Council proposes a reasonable plan/request, it is taken seriously by school management.'*

ii. CHANGES IN SCHOOL POLICIES

Student Councils felt their views were taken seriously with regard to the development of new policies or the amendment of existing policies because consultations with school management and the recommendations made by Student Councils had resulted in policy changes. The main areas where changes had been made were in relation to school uniforms, homework and healthy eating policies.

- *'The Principal and Deputy Principal always ask for the Student Council's opinion on new policies.'*

- *'The management are very supportive of us. For example, when we have made suggestions about the uniform, such as the introduction of pants, jacket and fleece to the uniform, they have given us their full support.'*

iii. CHANGES IN SCHOOL RULES

Similarly, the views of Student Council members on school rules were taken seriously by school management and have resulted in changes to many rules and, at times, in the partial or full revision of the Code of Behaviour.

- *'We were involved in the re-writing of school discipline policy.'*

iv. IMPROVEMENT IN SCHOOL FACILITES AND EQUIPMENT

Respondents reported improvements in school facilities and equipment as a result of Student Councils bringing issues to the attention of school management. For example, school management have helped improve eating and social areas, toilets and recycling facilities, as well as providing new sports equipment, water fountains, microwaves, vending machines, lockers and smoke alarms in response to the demands of Student Councils.

- *'We recently got a letter from management to say we can have locks on toilet doors.'*

v. IMPROVEMENT IN STUDENT WELFARE

Student Councils reported school management taking them seriously with regard to changes relating to student welfare, such as school bus times, supervised study times, exam timetables and the times of school meetings. Student Councils have also successfully lobbied school management to set up sports teams, provide extra-curricular activities and more PE classes.

- *'When the idea of 6th years not sitting the Christmas exams due to loss of school from weather was brought up by the Student Council, it was taken on board. However, school management decided not to go with the idea.'*

vi. MANAGEMENT SUPPORTS STUDENT COUNCIL ACTIVITIES

Student Councils stated that they knew school management takes their views seriously because they are fully supportive of their activities. School management and Principals often attend Student Council meetings, with many providing regular verbal or written feedback in addition to help and support in relation to their activities. Some Student Councils meet with school management regularly and attend Board of Management meetings and make presentations. Other schools fund training for Student Councils. The Principal in one school regularly tackles any problems or issues Student Councils may have with other staff members.

- *'The Principal meets the Chairperson and Secretary [of the Student Council] once a week to discuss issues arising at meetings.'*

vii. MANAGEMENT CONSIDERS AND SUPPORTS STUDENT COUNCIL IDEAS AND INITIATIVES

Similarly, consideration and support of ideas and initiatives presented by Student Councils were judged to be an affirmation of school managements' respect for their views. School managements have supported Student Councils' ideas, such as teacher-based classrooms and a joint Debs with a local school, as well as initiatives such as awareness campaigns and fund-raising.

- *'If the Student Council approach management with a proposal, this is always taken seriously, e.g. students did not have a secure place to lock their bikes and a proposal was drafted to make bike stands for the front of the school. The school fully supported the idea and the engineering teacher made the bike stands.'*

5.5 MAKING DECISIONS AUTONOMOUSLY

Student Councils were asked if they make decisions on their own. 25.5% said they always make decisions on their own; 49% said they sometimes do; 14.5% said they rarely do; and 11% said they never do (*see Figure 11*). Many respondents stated that approval for Student Council ideas must be sought from a higher authority, such as the School Principal, management or Board of Management.

FIGURE 11: STUDENT COUNCILS MAKE DECISIONS ON THEIR OWN
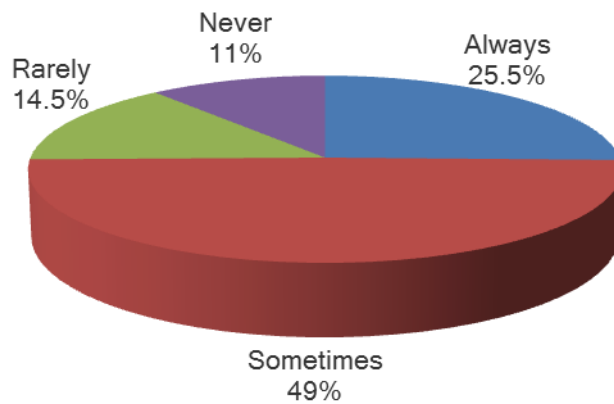
5.6   EXAMPLES OF MAKING DECISIONS AUTONOMOUSLY

Almost one-third of Student Councils that gave examples said they always consulted with school management, usually the Principal, in relation to decisions they make. While some Student Councils had to seek approval or permission from management before making decisions or conducting business, others simply discussed issues with management before proceeding further. Liaison Teachers sometimes act as mediators between Student Councils and school management.

▪   *'When a decision is made, we consult the Principal for permission; for example, last month we decided to do a major clean-up of the very large school pond.'*

▪   *'The Student Council often comes up with new ideas and plans, but the school management must always be consulted, or at least notified, of the actions being undertaken by the Council.'*

Some Student Councils take their Liaison Teacher's advice into account before making decisions and others consult with students on particular issues. A number of schools mentioned conducting research with students to gauge their opinions on various issues and one school has a suggestion box where students can give their ideas to the Student Council. One Student Council stated they had a *'two-way mutual co-operation policy'*, which means the Student Council discusses any decisions with school management and vice versa.

▪   *'We always make our decisions independently of taking teacher's advice into account; however, any decisions we do make must be passed before the Principal first.'*

▪   *'Decisions regarding activities we make in consultation with students and decisions regarding school policies are made in consultation with the school management.'*

Student Councils make decisions on their own in relation to the following key areas:

i. SCHOOL RULES AND POLICIES

Student Councils regularly make decisions on their own in terms of the development of new or existing school rules or policies, and how best to approach making these changes with school management.

- *'We chose to change the school uniform with the blessing of the school Board and are allowed to choose the uniform we want while keeping with our traditional uniform.'*

ii. IMPROVEMENT OF SCHOOL FACILITIES

Student Councils come up with ideas independently relating to the improvement of school facilities. For example, some Student Councils made decisions on their own concerning the development of new facilities, such as libraries and canteens. Other Student Councils deal directly with issues such as repairs by approaching school management or caretakers.

- *'We decided to go for a canteen rather than a vending machine for our school.'*

iii. ORGANISATION OF EVENTS AND INITIATIVES

Decisions regarding the organisation of events and initiatives are made by many Student Councils on their own. A large number of Student Councils organise fund-raising events on a regular basis. The majority of Student Councils nominate charities and decide when and how to best raise funds for them. Student Councils organise school events, such as graduation balls, discos, concerts, quizzes, poster competitions and trips, as well as initiatives such as setting up shops, newsletters and awareness campaigns on issues like road safety.

- *'The Student Council chooses its own charities to fund-raise for and it also organises these fund-raising events.'*
- *'The Student Council decided to produce a newsletter to inform fellow-students about the work they were doing.'*

iv. STUDENT COUNCIL BUSINESS

Student Councils commonly make decisions relating to their own affairs autonomously. For example, many Student Councils develop their own constitution and rules, and make decisions on their budget, meeting times, agendas and the key issues they wish to prioritise. Many Student Councils organise Student Council elections and some nominate Comhairle na nÓg Committee members. One Student Council stated that the 'executive' of their council makes all their important decisions.

- *'We decide which issues to prioritise.'*
- *'We ratified our own constitution.'*

CHAPTER 6:   IMPACT OF STUDENT COUNCILS

6.1   IMPACT ON SCHOOL RULES

Student Councils were asked if they had ever been consulted or responsible for changes in school rules and regulations, such as the Code of Behaviour. Overall, 78% of Student Councils have been consulted on school rules and regulations, whereas 22% have not. 62% said their Student Councils have been responsible for changes in rules and regulations, and 38% said they have not (*see Figure 12*).

FIGURE 12: IMPACT OF STUDENT COUNCILS ON SCHOOL RULES
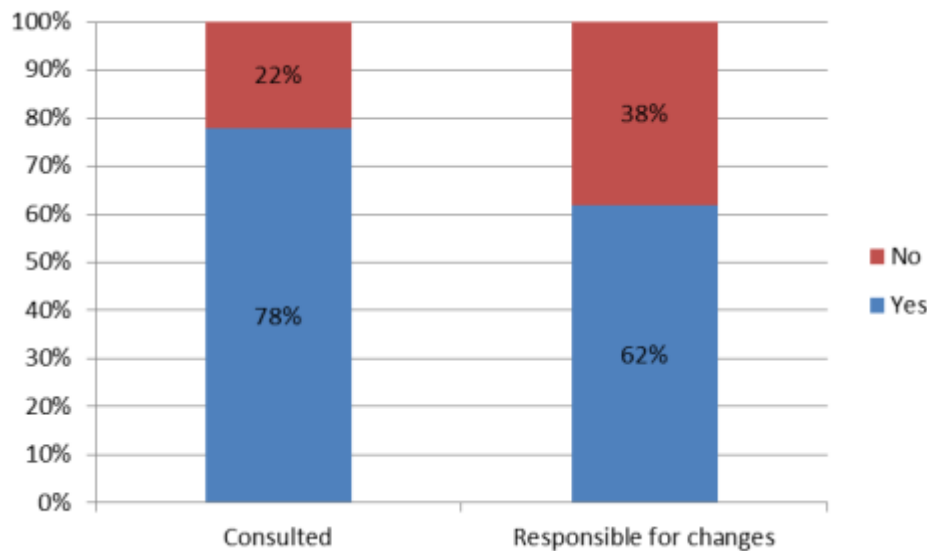
6.2   EXAMPLES OF IMPACT ON SCHOOL RULES

Student Councils gave examples of their impact on school rules.

i.   CONTENT AND WORDING

Student Councils were most likely to be consulted and have an impact on their school's rules or Code of Behaviour in terms of content and wording. The opinions of Student Councils were frequently sought when the Code of Behaviour was being developed or rules were being created, changed or updated. Student Councils were also proactive in recommending changes to school rules. Two Student Councils were members of schools committees which dealt with school rules and discipline.

- *'We were consulted on the new Code of Behaviour and any suggestions we made were taken on board.'*
- *'The Student Council was invited to a staff day and took a full and active part in designing a Code of Behaviour and in defining the aim and the principles of the school.'*
- *'Rephrasing school rules and removal of term "unladylike behaviour" as deemed sexist.'*

ii.   KEY AREAS OF RULES CHANGES

Student Councils made most impact on changing school rules in relation to school uniforms, usage of mobile phones, bullying, homework, lunchtime, and hair, make-up and jewellery. The following quotes from students detail the impact of Student Councils on school rules in some of these areas:

- *'Girls were not allowed wear certain shoes until the matter was brought up at a Student Council meeting and … then consulted with the Principal and Vice-Principal, where the problem was resolved.'*

- *'In our school we were not supposed to have our phones at all. The Student Council got this changed so that we could have our phones at break and lunch.'*

iii.   AWARENESS AND UNDERSTANDING OF SCHOOL RULES

Some schools consulted with Students Councils to gauge students' awareness and understanding of the school rules and sought recommendations on how to make rules easier to understand and how to simplify language. One Student Council helped run an awareness campaign on school rules and another conducted a survey among students to investigate their awareness and understanding of school rules.

- *'The language in the Code was hard to understand and was amended.'*

iv.   PUNISHMENTS

Suggestions regarding punishments and sanctions, as well as discipline investigations and systems, were also taken into account by school management. For example, students made successful recommendations in relation to changing the length of detention and introducing a discipline 'points systems'.

- *'[We] got changes to the discipline point system on homework.'*

6.3   IMPACT ON SCHOOL POLICIES

Respondents were asked if their Student Council had ever been consulted or responsible for changes in school policies (e.g. healthy eating or anti-bullying). Overall, 87% of Student Councils were consulted in relation to school policies and 13% were not. 73% stated their Student Councils were responsible for changes in school policies and 27% stated they were not (*see Figure 13*).

FIGURE 13: IMPACT OF STUDENT COUNCILS ON SCHOOL POLICIES
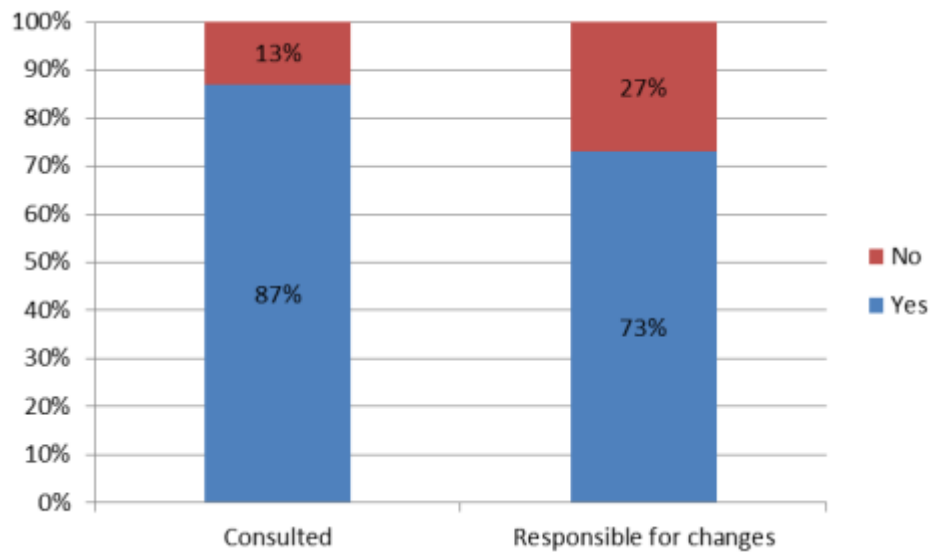
6.4   EXAMPLES OF IMPACT ON SCHOOL POLICIES

Student Councils had the most impact in relation to the following policies:

i.   HEALTHY EATING POLICIES

Student Councils were most likely to be consulted on or responsible for changes in healthy eating policies. For example, Student Councils were responsible for introducing healthy options in school canteens, hiring catering staff, setting up tuck shops with healthy snacks and vending machines with healthy food. Some Student Councils were represented on Health Promoting Schools Committees. Student Councils were involved in healthy eating awareness campaigns in schools and some have conducted research in this area to inform the development of policies.

- *'We had a huge input into drawing up the Healthy Eating Policy.'*
- *'The Student Council runs a tuck shop at small break every day, with just healthy food, snacks and drinks.'*
- *'Our Student Council organised a big school survey to find out what the students wanted to eat. As a result, the school hired in a catering company. In the vending machines, we try to have healthy options.'*

ii.   ANTI-BULLYING POLICIES

Another key area where Student Councils have had an impact on the development of new or existing policies was in relation to bullying. Some Student Councils have helped introduce 'bullying charters' into schools or encouraged the implementation of anti-bullying policies and codes. Others have carried out surveys on the topic of bullying in their schools and these have shaped the development

of their anti-bullying policies. Anti-bullying awareness campaigns and weeks are commonly organised by Student Councils.

- *'We encouraged the school to be stricter on bullying in school policy. It was more a case of getting the students to be better at enforcing the Code on Bullying in place than changing staff and management attitudes. School policy must be enforced by all members of the school. It has been our job to change the students' part of the Bullying Policy to make them a larger part of it.'*

- *'The Student Council would be largely involved in the bullying policy in our school … we distribute long and detailed surveys to every student in our school, to make sure every student has a say ... then, from the results, we come up with any changes or additions that need to be made to the policy.'*

iii. OTHER POLICY AREAS

Other areas where Student Councils have had an impact on policies within their schools include:

- uniform policies;
- make-up policies;
- mobile phone polices;
- substance abuse policies;
- homework/study policies;
- lunchtime policies;
- social, personal and health education (SPHE) policies;
- relationships and sexuality education (RSE) policies;
- green school policies;
- school tour policies;
- multi-media polices;
- admissions policies;
- mentoring policies;
- special needs policies;
- 'welcome' policies for foreign students;
- Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) school plans.

The following quotes highlight the impact of Student Councils on some of these policies:

- *'A policy concerning substance abuse was presented to the Student Council earlier on this year. It was the Student Council's job to read through and discuss each topic in the policy and suggest amendments that we felt were necessary. This policy was then sent to the Board of Management.'*

- *'We were consulted on the RSE policy for the school year 2009-10. We found that we did not need to make any changes with the reviewed policy.'*

- *'We played a key part in the school's policy on make-up.'*

6.5   OVERALL IMPACT OF STUDENT COUNCILS

Student Councils were asked how they rate their overall impact in their school. 18.5% felt their Student Council had a high impact; 75% felt they had a medium impact; and 6.5% felt they had a low impact. No Student Council reported having no impact at all (*see Figure 14*).

FIGURE 14: OVERALL IMPACT OF STUDENT COUNCIL
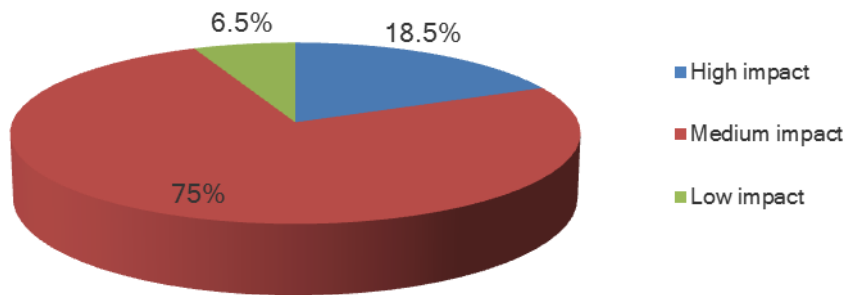
CHAPTER 7: ACHIEVEMENTS AND CHALLENGES

7.1 ACHIEVEMENTS OF STUDENT COUNCILS

Student Councils were asked what they considered to be their main achievements. The most frequently cited achievement was development of leadership skills among Student Council members (82%), followed by development of communication skills among members (77%), increased responsibility among members (77%), improvement of school atmosphere (61%), improvement of relations between students and staff (61%), a more caring school (37%), decrease in bullying in school (27%) and improvement in student behaviour (21%) (*see Table 7*).

TABLE 7: MAINS ACHIEVEMENTS OF STUDENT COUNCILS

Achievements	No. of respondents	%
Development of leadership skills among Student Council members	163	82%
Development of communication skills among Student Council members	154	77%
Increased responsibility among Student Council members	153	77%
Improvement of school atmosphere	122	61%
Improvement of relations between students and staff	122	61%
A more caring school	73	37%
Decrease in bullying in school	53	27%
Improvement in student behaviour in school	42	21%
Other	25	13%

A further 13% of Student Councils mentioned other achievements, which included:

i. GENERAL IMPROVEMENT IN SCHOOL LIFE

Respondents believe that Student Councils have generally improved school life for students through achievements such as improved facilities and equipment, and influencing policies on issues such as uniforms and healthy eating. For example, many Student Councils have been influential in changing school uniforms and improving the quality of food available in schools.

A number of Student Councils deemed improvement in school facilities, equipment and activities to be among their key achievements. Examples of such improvements included better social areas for students, improved sports facilities and the upgrading of musical and sports equipment. One Student Council set up e-mail accounts for students and another introduced student identity cards.

- *'We have made important changes to the school uniform. We have made a very pleasant and welcoming social area for students, with a TV, couches, etc.'*

ii. INCLUSION ETHOS

Many Student Councils were proud of their inclusion ethos and mentioned it as being among their main achievements. Respondents pointed out that Student Councils involve young people of all ages and backgrounds working together and respecting each other's point of view. Respondents stated that Student Councils provide an opportunity for marginalised and non-academic students to have a say and can sometimes bring students to the fore in school life who might not usually have the chance to do so. It was also noted that Student Councils provide an opportunity for students to take part in non-sporting activity. According to one Student Council, the inclusion of young people from ethnic minorities as members has benefited intercultural relations in their school.

- *'[The Student Council is] a great forum for lively discussion on all kinds of issues. Everyone from 1st year to 6th year contributes. Different age groups learn to listen to and respect each other's opinions.'*

- *'[The Student Council] also has an intercultural dimension in our school, given that over 50% of the student population are from other cultures. It has fostered a spirit of acceptance and intercultural ethos in the school.'*

- *'[The Student Council] allows marginalised and non-academic students to take on responsibility and to get involved. Students shone this year who normally don't in class.'*

iii. ORGANISATION OF ACTIVITIES AND EVENTS

Many Student Councils considered fund-raising for local, national and international charities to be among their best achievements. The organisation of activities, such as evening study for students and study skills seminars and social events such as talent shows, were also deemed to be significant achievements.

- *'[Student Council members] have become a nucleus group for help and cooperation around the school.'*

iv. PERSONAL BENEFITS FOR STUDENT COUNCIL MEMBERS

A number of Student Council members judged personal benefits to be among their main achievements. These included positive experiences, learning opportunities, building relationships with teachers and Principals, and developing public speaking and organisational skills. This reflects the top 3 findings in Table 7, which are related to the personal development of Student Council members and increased responsibility.

- *'Each member develops in many ways once a member, so it's a learning process for all.'*

v.   GIVING STUDENTS A VOICE

Many Student Councils felt their greatest achievement was in giving students a voice in their school. Student Councils frequently deal with students' issues and requests, and as a result bring about changes and involve them in the running of their schools. Some Student Councils viewed themselves as a link between students and staff.

▪ *'To be a voice for students in the school and a link between students and staff.'*

vi.   INVOLVMENT IN COMMUNITY AND OTHER COMMITTEES

Involvement in the local community and representation on other committees, such as Comhairle na nÓg and Tidy Towns, were considered by Student Councils to be among their positive achievements.

7.2   MAIN DIFFICULTIES

Respondents were asked what they considered to be the main difficulties for their Student Council. The main difficulties cited by Student Councils were lack of interest in the Student Council among students (55%); lack of understanding of what the Student Council does among students (50%); getting students involved in the Student Council (35%); lack of training for Student Council members (34%); poor attendance at meetings (28%); other (24%); not being taken seriously by school management (10%); lack of involvement among younger students (10%); and lack of general support for the Student Council from school management (8%) (*see Table 8*).

TABLE 8: MAIN DIFFICULTIES FOR STUDENT COUNCILS

Difficulties	No. of respondents	%
Lack of interest in the Student Council among students	107	55%
Lack of understanding of what the Student Council does among students	97	50%
Getting students involved in the Student Council	69	35%
Lack of training for Student Council members	66	34%
Poor attendance at meetings	55	28%
Other	46	24%
Not being taken seriously by school management	25	10%
Lack of involvement among younger students (e.g. 1st and 2nd years)	19	10%
Lack of general support for the Student Council from school management	16	8%

Other difficulties mentioned by 24% of Student Councils included the following:

i.   TIME PRESSURES

Time pressure or lack of time was mentioned by many Student Councils as the key difficulty they encounter. Student Council members reported that they, as well as Student Council Liaison Teachers, have difficulties in finding time to attend meetings due to busy schedules. They also stated that the discussion of a large range of issues at meetings can lead to time pressures. Students and Liaison Teachers usually have to give up their free time at lunchtime to attend meetings. A number of Student Councils said there was a lack of understanding among teachers in their schools in relation to attending meetings during class time. Scheduling Student Council meetings in school timetables and having a set time for Student Council announcements were both suggested as solutions to the problem.

- *'As we are limited to 40 minutes every 2 weeks, there is a lot of business to discuss and finding the time to fit it all in is a huge pressure.'*
- *'I would see it as very beneficial to have meetings with the Student Council timetabled.'*

ii.   LACK OF EFFECTIVENESS

Some Student Councils considered lack of effectiveness to be their main difficulty. This was primarily related to school management not agreeing to or acting on Student Council ideas. This, in turn, led to a lack of Student Council activities and responsibilities. In a small number of cases, Student Council Liaison Teachers were reported to be making decisions on behalf of Student Council members which contributed to their lack of autonomy and effectiveness. However, some Student Councils conceded that they needed to set more realistic and achievable goals. Others cited a need to improve communication with school management, staff and students in order to improve their own effectiveness.

- *'Our ideas are well received, but often very slowly acted upon, or not at all, by management.'*
- *'We feel that we don't have a real say, for example, change in lunchtime arrangements or other issues like changes in uniform.'*

iii.   LACK OF COMMITMENT

Lack of commitment was considered to be a problem for some Student Councils. A number of respondents reported difficulties in getting Senior Cycle or exam students involved in their Student Council. Some cited poor attendance and lack of dedication as issues and others found it difficult to maintain members' enthusiasm throughout the school year. Poor attendance was linked by some respondents to time pressures (*see above*).

- *'We have difficulty in getting senior students to become involved and it's difficult to maintain enthusiasm throughout the year.'*

iv.   INCLUSION

A number of Student Councils reported difficulties in including younger students, particularly those from 'weaker streams'. The voice of younger Student Council members was sometimes less likely to be heard than that of older students. One Student Council considered setting up a Student Council sub-committee for younger students to counteract this problem. Language difficulties were cited as a difficulty in relation to including students from ethnic minorities in Student Councils.

- *'Junior members tend to say very little. We are considering having sub-committee meetings for juniors so they will have more of a voice.'*

CHAPTER 8:   STUDENT COUNCIL RESOURCES, SUPPORTS AND TRAINING

The questions in this chapter were only added in the second data collection wave. Therefore, a total of 102 Student Councils responded to these questions.

8.1   STUDENT COUNCIL DIARY

Student Councils were asked if they use the Student Council Diary to assist in planning and organising their activities. Overall, 32.5% of those Student Councils that responded said they had used the Student Council Diary to this effect; 39% said they had not; and 28.5% did not know what the Student Council Diary was (*see Figure 15*).

FIGURE 15: USE OF STUDENT COUNCIL DIARY TO ASSIST IN PLANNING AND ORGANISING STUDENT COUNCIL ACTIVITIES
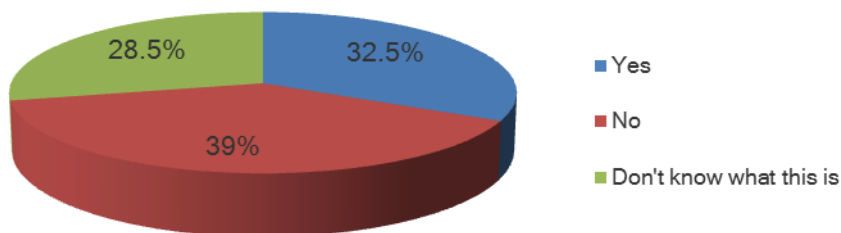
8.2   SUPPORTS

Student Council members were asked what supports would help improve how their Student Council works. Respondents suggested the following supports would be beneficial:

i.   STUDENT COUNCIL NETWORKS, FORUMS AND UNIONS

Respondents proposed the creation of local or regional Student Council networks or forums where Student Councils could share and compare information, ideas and experiences and possibly organise coordinated campaigns. The establishment of a national union of Student Councils in Ireland was also suggested.

- *'Meeting with other students from different schools and comparing what we've done.'*

ii.   RESOURCES

Student Council members would like more resources to help improve how their Student Council works. Suggested resources included lists of recommended simple yearly activities, examples of successful Student Councils and guidelines or 'kits' on how to run meetings, conduct surveys and fund-raising. It was felt that providing such resources would increase activities in these areas. The use

of online resources, as well as regular e-mails and text messages on relevant Student Council and youth-related issues, were also proposed by respondents. In addition, respondents would like resources such as posters and leaflets to distribute in schools to raise awareness of Student Councils and their activities.

- *'Examples of what other Councils have done and simple ideas on year-to-year activities.'*
- *'Kits on how to hold surveys/fund-raising events. It will make it more accessible and easy for us to do it more often in school if we have a plan to go by.'*

iii.   SUPPORT FROM SCHOOL MANAGEMENT

Respondents would like more support from school management to help improve their Student Council. Student Council members would like school management to support their activities, support them financially, allocate more time to Student Council meetings and provide a space in school timetables for their meetings. Assigning a more formal role to Student Councils within schools, such as those afforded to prefects, was put forward. A greater level of support, as well as understanding and respect of Student Councils from Boards of Management and Parent Councils, was also called for.

- *'It'd be nice if the Student Council was given equal say to the Parent Council and the Board of Management instead of lying in their shadow the whole time.'*

iv.   SUPPORT FROM OTHER STUDENTS

Similarly, Student Councils would like more support from other students in their school in relation to their activities. However, many respondents recognised the need for supports to help get students involved in Student Councils, to provide information to students on the advantages of involvement and to develop clear communications on their activities to all students. Another recommendation was the development of a structure that would allow students to interact with Student Councils so that changes and improvements to their activities could be suggested.

8.3   TRAINING

Similarly, Student Council members were asked what training would help improve how their Student Council functions. Respondents suggested the following types of training:

i.   INDUCTION TRAINING

The majority of respondents agreed that Student Councils should receive induction or introductory-type training at the beginning of each school year, after members have been elected. It was stated that this would maintain effectiveness and consistency among Student Councils and help integrate younger members.

- *'An introduction training programme for new Student Council members to improve understanding of the role of the Student Council and improve productivity and efficiency of meetings.'*

ii.   SKILLS TRAINING

The key skills Student Council members would like to acquire through training were communication, leadership, organisational, team-building, public speaking, time management and motivational skills.

▪ *'Communicating or public speaking training, because it is a big part of the Student Council role.'*

iii.   TRAINING ON PRACICAL ISSUES

Respondents suggested running training or workshops on practical issues relating to Student Councils, such as:

▪ how to organise and run meetings;
▪ the role of Student Council members, Chairpersons, Secretaries, etc;
▪ how to raise realistic issues for discussion;
▪ how to improve the efficiency of Student Councils;
▪ how to use websites to promote ideas and agendas;
▪ information on school management structures;
▪ how to improve the image and awareness of Student Councils among students;
▪ peer education and guidance;
▪ how to communicate to students about Student Councils' activities;
▪ how to generally improve Student Councils.

iv.   TRAINING ON SPECIFIC ISSUES

As well as these practical issues, Student Councils would like to receive training on specific issues, such as bullying and creating a positive atmosphere in schools, since they believe such training would raise their awareness on particular issues and help them develop and implement policies in these areas.

▪ *'I believe that some training on how to deal with social problems, such as bullying, should be brought in.'*

v.   TRAINING VISITS

A number of respondents suggested Student Councils should organise training days, where they visit local and national political structures to observe how they work and incorporate any relevant and useful structures and procedures into their Student Council.

▪ *'If we could meet with politicians to see how they have their meetings or with the City Council and watch one of their meetings to see how they function.'*

vi.   REGIONAL TRAINING

Conducting regional training seminars with Student Councils from a number of different schools was considered to be an opportunity for networking and sharing information on what works well for Student Councils and why. Some affiliated schools reported attending annual Student Council training days; however, organisation of regional training on a wider and official basis was suggested.

- *'As a Loreto school, we attend Council training days yearly with other Loreto schools. It would be good to get in contact with other and perhaps more local schools and have the school Councils work together to improve things at a local and community level.'*

vii.   TRAINING FOR TEACHERS AND OTHER STUDENTS

Respondents felt that Student Council Liaison Teachers, students and class representatives would also benefit from receiving training or attending workshops in relation to Student Councils in order to improve their understanding of them and to recruit new members.

viii.   TRAINING FACILITATORS

The majority of respondents suggested those facilitating training should be from outside schools, for example, from the Department of Education and Skills. One Student Council suggested that former Student Council members could give presentations in relation to their own experiences. Respondents stated that any training provided should be free of charge and take place during school hours because students would be more likely to participate in activities inside rather than outside these times.

ix.   BENEFITS OF TRAINING

The key benefits of training were deemed to be the acquisition of important skills and information to help Student Councils run successfully. Training was also judged to develop positive relationships between Student Councils members, teachers, management and other students. Some of the benefits of participation in training were outlined by one Student Council:

- *'At the beginning of the year, we did a one-day course with the Student Council members. This was of great benefit to the Council. It improved our communication skills, developed the internal relationships and confidence within the Council, revealed many topics we as individuals would like to deal with and developed our problem-solving and analysing skills.'*

CHAPTER 9:   COMMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Respondents were asked for additional comments or recommendations in relation to their Student Councils.

COMMENTS

Student Council members' comments can be categorised under the following headings:

i.   GENERAL COMMENTS

- Student Councils work well overall.

- There is usually no problem getting students involved in Student Councils.

- Student Councils are a great way for students to have their say on how their school is run.

- Student Councils take time to build up and improve over time.

ii.   SUCCESSFUL STUDENT COUNCILS

- The impact of Student Councils can change from year to year depending on the students involved and group dynamics.

- The support of School Principals is essential for Student Councils to work well.

- Effectiveness of Student Councils varies according to the quality of their President and Officers.

- Involvement in Student Councils requires dedication, support and hard work.

- Student Councils are a fundamental part of the successful running of every school.

iii.   SUPPORTS

- The Second-Level Support Service for Student Councils provides essential support through its many resources and activities.

iv.   BARRIERS

- Some Student Councils would like more say and involvement in their schools.

- There is a lack of awareness of Student Council activities in some schools.

- Time constraints mean some Student Councils find it difficult to raise their profile.

v.   BENEFITS

- Student Councils are a great way of meeting new people.

- Involvement in Student Councils is very rewarding.

- Student Councils are an excellent learning process for all involved.

- Student Councils can help younger students integrate into school life.

- Involvement in Student Councils has many personal gains for their members, including increased assertiveness, confidence and maturity.

- One Student Council has a member with special needs.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations were made by Student Councils members in relation to the following areas:

i. **RELATIONSHIPS AND COMMUNICATION WITH OTHER STUDENTS**

- Student Councils should be more open so students can come forward freely with ideas.
- There should be a suggestion box for students in all schools to provide Student Councils with ideas and opinions.
- Student Councils should be advertised and promoted better to encourage students to get involved.

ii. **COMMUNICATION WITH SCHOOL MANAGEMENT**

- Staff and management should be kept fully informed of meetings and activities.
- More information on Student Councils should be provided to Boards of Management.

iii. **AUTONOMY**

- Students should run Student Councils, not teachers.

iv. **NETWORKING**

- Opportunities to meet with other Student Councils would be beneficial.
- A national representative body for Student Councils should be set up to offer support to Student Councils.
- Student Councils should have more involvement with the Department of Education and Skills.

v. **TRAINING**

- Student Council training should be provided at the beginning of each school year.
- More training should be provided for Student Council members, for example, leadership training for Student Council officers would be helpful to run more efficient meetings.

vi. **PRACTICAL RECOMMENDATIONS**

- There should be a designated time for Student Council meetings other than lunchtime.
- Student Councils should be elected at the end of the school year to allow them to begin work quickly in September.

The following comments were made by respondents:

- *'The Student Council is a brilliant way to share what the students want and what is bothering them. I'm honoured that the students in my class respect me to represent their class.'*

- *'Our Student Council has high impact because it is fully representative and the Principal meets them regularly and treats them with respect. Their role is essentially consultative rather than rights-based. There is little or no confrontation. The problem with this model is it doesn't work if a Principal is not supportive or does not take the Council seriously.'*

- *'The Student Council is a fundamental part of the successful running of our school.'*

- *'My Student Council is a great way of getting involved and meeting new people.'*

- *'I really enjoyed being part of the Student Council this year and as I was a 1st year it helped me integrate easier. It also helped the other 1st years by getting them involved in the school.'*

- *'Each year, the Student Council is getting better. It takes time to build. We aim to have students really wanting to be on the Council. When students see what they have achieved, it is very rewarding.'*

- *'I found the whole experience very rewarding as I would like to follow a career in politics and I have learned a lot about how committees work and what can be achieved through negotiation.'*

- *'I think it is good to get young people involved in the Student Council so that their voice is heard in the school community. It is fun and interesting.'*

CHAPTER 10:   SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

OVERVIEW

It proved a considerable challenge to secure responses to the questionnaire from Student Councils. Despite considerable efforts and taking a number of different approaches to encourage schools to participate, only 208 schools responded from a total of 730 second-levels schools. This represented a response rate of 28.5%.

PROFILE OF STUDENT COUNCILS

Almost half of all Student Councils were from schools based in Leinster, followed by Munster, Connacht and Ulster. 62% of Student Councils were from co-educational schools. The majority of Student Councils (28%) had 20 or more members. Fifth-year students were the most represented group on Student Councils and Transition Year students were the least represented group. The youngest age of a Student Council member was 11 years and the oldest age was 20 years. The largest number of Student Councils (28%) had been in existence for more than 10 years.

HOW STUDENT COUNCILS WORK

The great majority of Student Council members (93%) were elected by other students in their school. Almost all Student Councils (93%) meet at least once a month, with just over half meeting more than once a month. Student Council meetings are ordinarily attended by Student Council members and Liaison Teachers, and on occasions by School Principals, other teachers, other students and guests. Student Council meetings are usually chaired by the Student Council Chairperson, who is a student.

ROLE OF STUDENT COUNCILS

The main roles of Student Councils outlined by respondents were '*to make sure students have a say*' and '*to make your school a better place to be in*'.

STUDENT COUNCIL ACTIVITIES

60% of Student Councils always decide on their own activities, 39% sometimes do and 1% rarely do. Just over half of Student Councils (53%) are involved in activities in their local community, such as voluntary work or fund-raising. 37% of Student Councils have been represented on other school committees.

RELATIONSHIPS AND COMMUNICATION WITH OTHERS

The most positive relationships reported in the study were between Student Councils and School Principals, followed by teachers and then other students. 60% of Student Councils said they always consult with other students on important issues, whereas 36% said they sometimes do and 4% said they rarely do. The most common activity involving Student Councils and other students was reporting to classes as student representatives.

INVOLVEMENT IN DECISION-MAKING

The majority of Student Councils (68%) are sometimes involved in decision-making with school management, 9% are always involved, 16% are rarely involved and 7% are never involved. Student Councils were most regularly consulted or involved in decision-making with school management in relation to school policies, rules, facilities and equipment, how schools operate, the design of school uniforms and school events and campaigns.

57% of Student Councils felt their views were always taken seriously by school management, 38% felt they were sometimes taken seriously, 4% felt they were rarely taken seriously and 1% felt they were never taken seriously. Student Councils felt their views were taken seriously by school management because they listened to them and took their views into account when developing or changing school policies and rules. The views of Student Councils also impacted on the improvement of school facilities, equipment and student welfare. In addition, the support of Student Council activities, ideas and initiatives by school management was judged to be an indicator of respect.

25.5% of Student Councils always make decisions on their own, almost half (49%) sometimes do, 14.5% rarely do and 11% never do. Student Councils made decisions on their own with regard to developing or changing school rules and policies, improving school facilities, organising events and initiatives, and conducting Student Council business. However, almost one-third of those who gave examples had to discuss their ideas with school management or gain permission before making decisions.

IMPACT OF STUDENT COUNCILS

78% of Student Councils were consulted in relation to school rules and regulations, while 62% were responsible for changes in rules and regulations in their school (such as the Code of Behaviour). 87% of Student Councils were consulted in relation to school policies and 73% were responsible for changes in policies, such as healthy eating and anti-bullying policies.

The majority of respondents (75%) felt their Student Council had a medium impact in their school, 18% felt they had a high impact and 9% felt they had a low impact.

ACHIEVEMENTS AND CHALLENGES

Respondents considered their main achievements to be the development of leadership and communication skills among Student Council members, as well as increased responsibility among members. The main difficulties identified for Student Councils were a lack of interest and understanding among other students in their work. Lack of time for Student Council activities was also cited as a problem and timetabling of meetings was suggested as a solution.

STUDENT COUNCIL RESOURCES, SUPPORTS AND TRAINING

32.5% of respondents had used the Student Council Diary to assist in planning and organising activities, 39% had not and 28.5% did not know what the Student Council Diary was. Suggested supports to help improve how Student Councils operate included the establishment of Student Council networks, forums and unions, as well as additional resources and support from school management and other students.

Respondents recommended induction training each year for all new members of Student Councils, skills development training (e.g. communication and leadership skills), training on practical Student Council issues (e.g. how to organise and run meetings), training on specific issues like bullying, training days in local and national political structures, and training with other local or regional Student Councils to facilitate the sharing of information and networking.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Key recommendations included:

- greater autonomy for Student Councils;
- timetabling of Student Council meetings;
- improvement in relations and communication between Student Councils and school management and other students;
- more training and networking opportunities for Student Councils.

CHAPTER 11:   KEY MESSAGES

Over 8 out of 10 Student Councils (81%) have been in existence for 5 or more years and 37% have been in existence for 10 or more years. The great majority of Student Council members (93%) were democratically elected by other students in their school.

Student Councils are permanent participation structures with almost all (93%) meeting at least once a month and just over half meeting more than once a month. Student Councils are run by students and meetings are usually chaired by the Student Council Chairperson, who is a Student Council member.

In terms of autonomy, 60% of Student Councils always decide on their own activities and 25.5% always make decisions on their own. However, the audit found that the majority of Student Councils (68%) are only sometimes involved in decision-making with school management.

Similarly, while over half of Student Councils (57%) felt their views were always taken seriously by school management, a large number of young people (43%) felt their views were only sometimes or rarely taken seriously. Student Councils felt their views were most likely to be taken seriously with regard to the development of school rules and policies. School management listening to Student Councils was considered to be a key indicator of respect.

Student Councils had the most impact with regard to the development of new or existing school rules and policies. Over three-quarters of Student Councils (78%) have been consulted by their school management regarding school rules (e.g. the Code of Behaviour) and 62% have been responsible for changes in rules. Similarly, 87% of Student Councils have been consulted by their school management on the subject of school policies and 73% have been responsible for policy changes.

However, while large numbers of Student Councils are being consulted by school management in relation to school rules and policies, there is a shortfall in relation to their overall impact on decision-making in these areas. The majority of Student Councils (75%) felt they were having a 'medium' impact in their schools.

Other key achievements included the involvement of just over half of Student Councils (53%) in activities in their community, such as fund-raising and voluntary work, and representation of 37% of Student Councils on other school committees.

The most significant findings and messages from the audit centre on the relationship between Student Councils and the main student body, as well as the fact that the key benefits of Student Councils relate to the Student Council members personally rather than the student body as a whole. This is evidenced by the fact that Student Councils considered their main achievements to be the development of leadership and communication skills among members, in addition to increased responsibility among members.

The majority of Student Councils agreed their main role was to make sure students have a say. However, just 60% said they always consulted with other students on important issues and lack of interest and understanding among other students were identified as the main difficulties for Student Councils. Furthermore, Student Councils stated that their most positive relationships were with School Principals, followed by teachers and then students. Improving relationships and communication with other students were among the key recommendations proposed by Student Council members.

Respondents suggested the need for additional supports, such as Student Council networks, forums and unions, extra resources, and more support from school management and other students. While Student Council members called for additional resources, just under one-third (32.5%) had ever used the Student Council Diary to assist in planning and organising their activities. Finally, respondents recommended the provision of training for Student Council members, such as induction, skills development and practical training, to help improve how Student Councils work.

SURVEY OF STUDENT COUNCIL LIAISON TEACHERS

This section of the report outlines the results from a brief survey conducted with Student Council Liaison Teachers.

CONTENTS

OVERVIEW

INTRODUCTION

This section documents the findings of a brief online survey aimed at Student Council Liaison Teachers. The role of Student Council Liaison Teachers is to promote the interests of Student Councils, to assist and advise them, and to be their link between students, teachers and management.

METHODOLOGY

An online survey for Student Councils Liaison Teachers was developed in the second phase of the study. The survey was developed with the use of a popular online survey design tool (Survey Monkey) and the questionnaire took approximately 10 minutes to complete. A link to the online survey was sent to all Student Council Liaison Teachers via a letter from the DCYA, which outlined the aims and objectives of the study. The survey was completed by respondents between November 2010 and February 2011. The survey aimed to capture information about the length of time teachers were in posts, use of resource material, supports and training. There was a very low response rate, with just 91 Student Council Liaison Teachers responding to the survey. Possible reasons for this include time pressures and lack of Student Council Liaison Teachers due to difficulties in replacing those who have taken up new posts in their schools, all of which were mentioned by respondents in the survey. A copy of the survey is provided in Appendix D.

AN AUDIT OF CHILDREN AND
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SURVEY OF
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CHAPTER 1:   OUTLINE OF MAIN FINDINGS

1.1   LENGTH OF TIME IN POST

Respondents were asked how long they have been a Student Council Liaison Teacher. One-third (33%) had held the position for 5 or more years; 11% for 4 years; 21% for 3 years; 22% for 2 years; and 13% had been appointed within the last year.

FIGURE 1: LENGTH OF TIME STUDENT COUNCIL LIAISON TEACHER IS IN POST
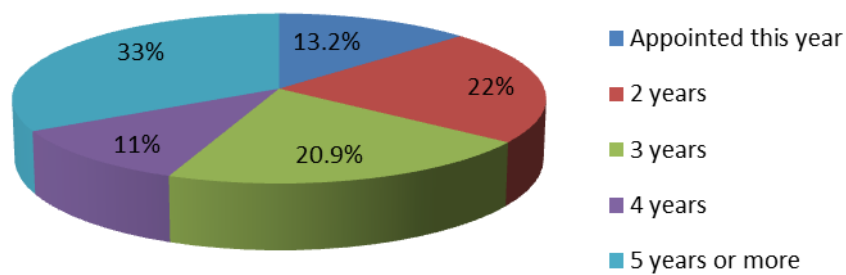
1.2   USE OF STUDENT COUNCIL RESOURCES

Liaison Teachers were asked if the Student Council Resource Pack was used in their school. 87% of respondents said the Resource Pack was used and 13% said it was not. Similarly, Liaison Teachers were asked if the CSPE Resource Pack *Student Councils in Schools* was used in their school. Overall, 58% of Liaison Teachers said it was used and 42% said it was not.

1.3   SUPPORTS AND TRAINING

The survey asked respondents if they had ever availed of the support or training offered by the Student Council Support Service. 80% of Liaison Teachers stated they had availed of support or training from the Student Council Support Service and 20% stated they had not.

Liaison Teachers were asked to specify which supports and services they had availed of. Respondents most frequently used the Student Council Liaison Teacher Folder (68%), and availed of in-service days (61%), evening workshops (50%), Student Council training (45%), phone advice (18%) and school visits (12%) (*see Table 1*).

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TABLE 1: TYPE OF SUPPORT/SERVICES LIAISON TEACHERS AVAILED OF FROM STUDENT COUNCIL SUPPORT SERVICE

Type of supports/services	No. of respondents	%
Student Council Liaison Teacher Folder	50	68%
In-service days	45	61%
Evening workshops	37	50%
Student Council training	33	45%
Phone advice	13	18%
School visits	9	12%

1.4   REQUIRED SUPPORTS

Student Council Liaison Teachers were asked to detail the supports they require to help improve how Student Councils operate in their schools. Key supports requested by Student Council Liaison Teachers included the following:

i.   STUDENT COUNCIL TRAINING

Many Liaison Teachers recommended ongoing training for Student Council members. Training was deemed to be particularly important for new members and was suggested for the beginning of each year. Liaison Teachers felt training on practical issues relating to Student Councils (such as meetings, roles and responsibilities, as well as skills development training) would be most useful for students. While some Liaison Teachers suggested in-service training for Student Councils, others suggested training should be provided by outside facilitators. A 2-hour limit on Student Council training was recommended.

▪ *'I am the only Liaison Teacher in a big school (and not a CSPE teacher) and find it difficult to get the time to give training to the students. I feel the students would benefit from training provided by outside teachers.'*

ii.   LIAISON TEACHER TRAINING

Liaison Teachers would like to avail of more in-service training and evening workshops on an ongoing basis. Training was deemed to be particularly important for teachers new to the post of Student Council Liaison Teacher. Many Liaison Teachers reported positive experiences of previous in-service training and evening workshops, and cited benefits such as networking with other teachers, sharing of ideas, valuable discussions, feedback, support materials and gained confidence in their roles. Difficulties relating to in-service training and evening workshops mentioned included not being released for training from schools, priority for curricular in-service training, lack of time to attend training and problems in attending evening workshops due to family commitments. Teachers stated that any in-service training should be free of charge.

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- *'Ongoing evening workshops, which I find very helpful for sharing ideas and listening to other teachers' experiences. I would like to commend all the presenters of workshops I have attended for their enthusiasm, encouragement and ideas. I find the support materials, including the Student Council Training CD, most helpful.'*
- *'I completed the 2-day ASTI Student Council seminar and workshop, which I found exceptional.'*

iii. TRAINING FOR OTHER GROUPS

Training for other groups, such as school management, Boards of Management and School Principals, was discussed to help improve the efficiency of Student Councils. Joint training programmes involving school management structures and Student Council members were also proposed.

- *'Training for Principals in regards to making their Council more effective in the school.'*

iv. SCHOOL VISITS

Liaison Teachers recommended more school visits from the Student Council Support Service to provide information, generate enthusiasm and raise awareness of the work of Student Councils among students, as well as to provide training for Student Council members.

v. NETWORKING

The development of local networks for Liaison Teachers and Student Councils was suggested by many respondents. Liaison Teachers felt they would benefit from sharing information and creating links and lines of communication with other Liaison Teachers in their area. They also thought local Student Councils should network with each other to discuss and share information, ideas and best practice, and build contacts. Networking with successful Student Councils was considered to be a good idea.

- *'It would be good to bring different Student Councils together to learn from each other and discuss different issues.'*
- *'Regular meetings of Liaison Teachers to find out what is happening in other schools.'*

vi. IDEAS AND ADVICE FOR SUCESSFUL STUDENT COUNCILS

Liaison Teachers would like support in relation to developing ideas for successful Student Council activities and projects in their schools. They would also like ideas on how Student Council members can set attainable goals, follow through on ideas, take responsibility and maintain interest in their positions. In some schools, Student Council roles, such as fund-raising and mentoring, are often the responsibility of other groups of students, e.g. Transition Year students and prefects. Liaison Teachers would welcome suggestions and ideas from other schools that have developed successful roles for their Student Council members. Recommendations for Student Council roles in smaller schools and for shy students were also called for. Finally, Liaison Teachers would like ideas on how to create

greater awareness of the important work of Student Councils among teachers and other students in their schools, other than awareness days or weeks which were judged not to be effective.

vii. SUPPORT FROM SCHOOL

Some Student Council Liaison Teachers called for more support from staff and school management in relation to their role and the role of Student Councils. Respondents would like the position of Liaison Teacher to become a post of responsibility in schools rather than a voluntary post. Sharing of responsibilities with other teachers, such as Civil, Social and Political Education (CSPE) teachers, was suggested. Difficulty in replacing Liaison Teachers who have taken up new posts in their schools was discussed. In addition, Liaison Teachers would like support from their schools to timetable Student Council meetings since time pressure was mentioned as a problem.

viii. WEB AND PHONE SUPPORTS

Phone supports and online supports, such as the Student Council Support website, were considered to be important supports for Liaison Teachers. Online advice for teachers and the creation of a webpage to update them on Student Council events in other schools were also suggested.

- *'Ongoing web support, as we find the Student Council website informative and relevant.'*

ix. RESOURCES

A small number of schools stated that they had lost or not received resources such as the Student Council Liaison Teacher Folders, Student Councils Diaries and information packs.

- *'Previous information packs have fallen down a "black hole" in the school!'*

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CHAPTER 2:   KEY FINDINGS

2.1   LENGTH OF TIME IN POST

Two-thirds of Student Council Liaison Teachers have been in their post for less than 5 years and one-third for the last 5 or more years.

2.2   USE OF STUDENT COUNCIL RESOURCES

87% of Liaison Teachers have used the Student Council Resource Pack, but considerably less (58%) have used the CSPE Resource Pack *Student Councils in Schools*.

2.3   SUPPORTS AND TRAINING

Four out of 5 Liaison Teachers (80%) have availed of support or training from the Student Council Support Service. The Student Council Liaison Teacher Folder was the most used support among respondents, followed by in-service days, evening workshops and Student Council training. Only a small number of Liaison Teachers had availed of phone advice and schools visits.

2.4   REQUIRED SUPPORTS

Key supports identified by respondents to help improve how Student Councils operate included ongoing training for Student Council members and Liaison Teachers, particularly for new members and teachers; training for school management; more school visits; the development of local networks for Student Councils and Liaison Teachers to share information, ideas and best practice; support in relation to ideas and advice for successful Student Councils; more support from schools for Student Councils and Liaison Teachers; and phone and web-based supports and resources.

AN AUDIT OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S PARTICIPATION IN DECISION-MAKING

APPENDICES

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Appendix A:

Survey of Comhairle na nÓg and other organisations

INFORMATION ON YOUR ORGANISATION

1. Name and address of organisation:
_____

2. Type of organisation:
□ Comhairle na nÓg
□ Non-governmental organisation
□ Other (*please specify*) _____

3. Counties covered by your organisation:

□ Carlow	□ Kilkenny	□ Offaly
□ Cavan	□ Laois	□ Roscommon
□ Clare	□ Leitrim	□ Sligo
□ Cork	□ Limerick	□ Tipperary
□ Donegal	□ Longford	□ Waterford
□ Dublin	□ Louth	□ Westmeath
□ Galway	□ Mayo	□ Wexford
□ Kerry	□ Meath	□ Wicklow
□ Kildare	□ Monaghan	

4. Local authorities your organisation deals with:
□ Carlow County Council
□ Cavan County Council
□ Clare County Council
□ Cork City Council
□ Cork County Council
□ Donegal County Council
□ Dublin City Council
□ Dun Laoghaire–Rathdown County Council
□ Fingal County Council
□ South Dublin County Council
□ Galway City Council
□ Galway County Council
□ Kerry County Council
□ Kildare County Council
□ Kilkenny County Council
□ Laois County Council
□ Leitrim County Council
□ Limerick City Council
□ Limerick County Council
□ Longford County Council
□ Louth County Council
□ Mayo County Council
□ Meath County Council
□ Monaghan County Council
□ Offaly County Council
□ Roscommon County Council
□ Sligo County Council
□ North Tipperary County Council
□ South Tipperary County Council

□ Waterford City Council
□ Waterford County Council
□ Westmeath County Council
□ Wexford County Council
□ Wicklow County Council

5. Please indicate the age ranges of the children and young people that your organisation works with/develops policies and/or services for:
□ 0-4 years
□ 5-12 years
□ 13-18 years
□ We do not have a specific focus on children and young people
□ Don't know

6. Does your organisation involve children and young people in decision-making on the policies, strategies or services that you deliver or for which you are responsible?
□ Yes, we are currently involving children and young people in decision-making
□ Yes, we have involved children and young people in the past
□ No, but we are planning to
□ No, and we have no plans to do so
□ Don't know

<div align="center">

[If you answered No, please go to Question 12]

</div>

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PARTICIPATION ACTIVITY

</div>

7. Are children and young people involved in decision-making in your organisation as?
□ A once-off event
□ An ongoing process

8. Do the decisions that young people are involved in have an influence at?
□ A national level
□ A local level
□ An organisational level

9. Which issues are children and young people involved in making decisions about through your organisation?
Please tick all that apply

□ Community safety/crime
□ Education   □ Leisure/recreation
□ Environmental issues   □ Regeneration
□ Mental health   □ Social services
□ Physical health   □ Transport
□ Sexual health   □ Youth services
□ Housing   □ Other (*please specify*) _____
                                 _____

10. For how long has your organisation been involving children and young people in decision-making?
□ For the last year
□ For the last 2 years
□ For the last 3 years
□ For the last 4 years
□ For the last 5 or more years
□ Don't know

11. Over the past 3 years, has the amount of work you have done to involve children and young people in decision-making increased, decreased or stayed the same?
□ Increased
□ Decreased
□ Stayed the same
□ Don't know

PARTICIPATION LEVELS AND METHODS

---

12. At what level(s) do you involve children and young people in decision-making?
Please tick all that apply
□ In identifying the policies and/or services that matter to young people
□ Asking for their ideas when developing new policies and/or services
□ Asking about their ideas when changing or developing existing policies and/or services
□ In monitoring or evaluating services and/or policies
□ In the delivery of services
□ In decisions that are made about them as individuals (e.g. health matters, family issues, custody issues)
□ Children and young people are <u>not</u> involved in decision-making on any level
□ Don't know

13. Which of the following approaches does your organisation use to involve children and young people in decision-making?
Please include all methods that are currently being used or have been used in the past.
Please tick all that apply
□ Child- and youth-friendly literature
□ Research into children and young people's views and needs
□ Surveys of children and young people on particular issues
□ Public meetings and events for children and young people
□ Focus groups
□ Ongoing informal consultation with children and young people
□ Children and young people's advisory or reference groups
□ Permanent youth councils/forums
□ Interactive websites specifically for children and young people
□ E-mail/text-messaging
□ None of the above
□ Don't know
□ Other (*please specify*) _____

REACHING CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

Which groups of children and young people does your organisation involve in decision-making in terms of the following?

14. Age: □ 0-4   □ 5-12   □ 13-15   □ 16-17

15. Gender: □ Male   □ Female

16. Ethnicity:
□ Young people from ethnic minorities
□ Young refugees and asylum-seekers
□ Young Travellers

17. Disability: □ Learning difficulty   □ Physical/sensory disability

18. Settings:
□ Children currently in foster care
□ Children formerly in foster care
□ Children currently in residential care
□ Children formerly in residential care
□ Children in hospital

19. Location: □ Rural areas   □ Urban areas

20. Other
□ Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered
□ Early school-leavers
□ Young offenders
□ Other groups of children and young people (*please specify*) _____

21a. Do you find it hard to reach specific groups of children and young people?
□ Yes   □ No

21b. If Yes, which groups?
_____

22a. Have you identified effective ways to address this?
□ Yes   □ No

22b. If Yes, please give details
_____

IMPACT OF PARTICIPATION

23. How much influence do you think children and young people have on decisions made by your organisation?
□ A great deal of influence
□ Some influence in particular areas
□ Very little influence
□ None at all
□ Don't know

24. Has the participation of children and young people in your organisation ever had the following impact:
□ Influenced the development of a new policy and/or service
□ Influenced the changing or development of existing policies and/or services
□ Influenced decisions about issues/matters that affect young people directly
□ None of the above

25. Please give an example of the impact of involving children and young people in decision-making in your organisation:
_____
_____

26. How do you assess children and young people's participation and its impact?
Please tick all that apply
□ Monitoring
□ Self-evaluation
□ Formal evaluation
□ Other (*please specify*)_____
□ No assessment is needed

SUPPORT FOR PARTICIPATION

27. Which of the following types of resources, if any, does your organisation allocate specifically to support children and young people's participation?
Please tick all that apply
□ A separate funding stream/budget
□ Dedicated staff time
□ Dedicated admin. time
□ Use of premises/office space
□ Training and events costs
□ Transport and other expenses for children and young people
□ Other (*please specify*) _____
□ No resources specifically allocated to children and young people

28. Your organisation's approach
Please tick the appropriate response(s)
□ Our organisation values the right of children and young people to be involved in decision-making.
□ Our organisation understands the practical implications of involving children and young people in decision-making.
□ Our organisation would like to involve children and young people more, but we don't have the resources.
□ Our organisation would like to involve children and young people more, but we don't know how to.
□ Children and young people's participation is integral to the work of our organisation.
□ Our services have improved as a result of children and young people's participation.
□ Our organisation always ensures that children and young people know about the results of their involvement.
□ Our organisation has no interest in involving children and young people in our decision-making processes.
□ Our organisation has no need to involve children and young people in our decision-making processes.

ATTITUDES AND PERCEPTIONS

Please state the extent to which you agree or disagree with each of the following statements about decision-making:

29. *Children and young people have a right to be involved in public decision-making.*
Strongly disagree □   Disagree □   Unsure □   Agree □   Strongly Agree □

30. *Children and young people should only be involved in decision-making where there is clear evidence about the benefits of their involvement.*
Strongly disagree □   Disagree □   Unsure □   Agree □   Strongly Agree □

31. *It is too difficult to involve younger children in decision-making.*
Strongly disagree □   Disagree □   Unsure □   Agree □   Strongly Agree □

32. *There are no decisions which children and young people cannot be involved in, providing they are properly supported.*
Strongly disagree □   Disagree □   Unsure □   Agree □   Strongly Agree □

33. There are some decisions which children and young people cannot be involved in.
Strongly disagree □   Disagree □   Unsure □   Agree □   Strongly Agree □

34. Is there anything else you want to highlight about your experience of or attitudes towards participation by children and young people?
_____
_____
_____
_____

Appendix B:

Survey of the HSE and HSE-funded organisations

INFORMATION ON YOUR DEPARTMENT/TEAM/ORGANISATION

1. Name and address of Department/Team/Organisation:

_____

2. Type of Department/Team/Organisation:
□ HSE Local Health Office
□ HSE Hospital-based team
□ HSE-funded service
□ Other (*please specify*) _____

3. Region covered:
□ HSE Dublin Mid-Leinster   □ HSE Dublin North-East
□ HSE South   □ HSE West

4. Please indicate the age ranges of the children and young people that your Department/Team/Organisation works with/develops policies and/or services for:
□ 0-4   □ 5-12   □ 13-17
□ We do not have a specific focus on children and young people
□ Don't know

5. Have you used the HSE Service User Involvement Strategy to help you involve children and young people in decision-making?
□ Yes   □ No   □ Don't know

6. Have you received the HSE Guidelines on Working with Children?
□ Yes   □ No

7. Does your Department/Team/Organisation involve children and young people in decision-making on the policies, strategies or services that you deliver or for which you are responsible?
□ Yes, we are currently involving children and young people in decision-making
□ Yes, we have involved children and young people in the past
□ No, but we are planning to
□ No, and we have no plans to do so
□ Don't know
[If you answered No, please go to Question 13]

PARTICIPATION ACTIVITY

8. Are children and young people involved in decision-making in your Department/Team/Organisation as?
□ A once-off event   □ An ongoing process

9. Do the decisions that young people are involved in have an influence at?
□ A national level
□ A local level
□ An organisational level

10. Which issues are children and young people involved in making decisions about through your Department/Team/Organisation?
Please tick all that apply
□ Community safety/crime
□ Education
□ Environmental issues
□ Mental health
□ Physical health
□ Sexual health
□ Housing
□ Leisure/recreation
□ Regeneration
□ Social services
□ Transport
□ Youth services
□ Other (*please specify*) _____

11. For how long has your Department/Team/Organisation been involving children and young people in decision-making?
□ For the last year
□ For the last 2 years
□ For the last 3 years
□ For the last 4 years
□ For the last 5 or more years
□ Don't know

12. Over the past 3 years, has the amount of work you have done to involve children and young people in decision-making increased, decreased or stayed the same?
□ Increased   □ Stayed the same
□ Decreased   □ Don't know

PARTICIPATION LEVELS AND METHODS

13. At what level(s) do you involve children and young people in decision- making?
Please tick all that apply
□ In identifying the policies and/or services that matter to young people
□ Asking for their ideas when developing new policies and/or services
□ Asking about their ideas when changing or developing existing policies and/or services
□ In monitoring or evaluating services and/or policies
□ In the delivery of services
□ In decisions that are made about them as individuals (e.g. health matters, family issues, custody issues)
□ Children and young people are <u>not</u> involved in decision-making on any level
□ Don't know

14. Which of the following approaches does your Department/Team/Organisation use to involve children and young people in decision-making?
Please include all methods that are currently being used or have been used in the past.
Please tick all that apply
□ Child- and youth-friendly literature
□ Research into children and young people's views and needs
□ Surveys of children and young people on particular issues
□ Public meetings and events for children and young people
□ Focus groups

□ Ongoing informal consultation with children and young people
□ Children and young people's advisory or reference groups
□ Permanent youth councils/forums
□ Interactive websites specifically for children and young people
□ E-mail/text-messaging
□ None of the above
□ Don't know
□ Other (*please specify*) _____

REACHING CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

Which groups of children and young people does your Department/Team/Organisation involve in decision-making in terms of the following?

15. Age: □ 0-4   □ 13-15   □ 5-12   □ 16-17

16. Gender: □ Male   □ Female

17. Ethnicity:
□ Young people from ethnic minorities
□ Young refugees and asylum-seekers
□ Young Travellers

18. Disability: □ Learning difficulty   □ Physical/sensory disability

19. Settings:
□ Children currently in foster care
□ Children formerly in foster care
□ Children currently in residential care
□ Children formerly in residential care
□ Children in hospital

20. Location: □ Rural areas   □ Urban areas

21. Other:
□ Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered
□ Early school-leavers
□ Young offenders
□ Other groups of children and young people (*please specify*) _____

22a. Do you find it hard to reach specific groups of children and young people?
□ Yes   □ No

22b. If Yes, which groups?
_____

23a. Have you identified effective ways to address this?
□ Yes   □ No

23b. If Yes, please give details
_____

IMPACT OF PARTICIPATION

24. How much influence do you think children and young people have on decisions made by your Department/Team/Organisation?
□ A great deal of influence
□ Some influence in particular areas
□ Very little influence
□ None at all
□ Don't know

25. Has the participation of children and young people in your Department/Team/Organisation ever had the following impact:
Please all that apply
□ Influenced the development of a new policy and/or service
□ Influenced the changing or development of existing policies and/or services
□ Influenced decisions about issues/matters which affect young people directly
□ None of the above

26. Please give an example of the impact of involving children and young people in decision-making in your Department/Team/Organisation:
_____
_____
_____

27. How do you assess children and young people's participation and its impact?
Please tick all that apply
□ Monitoring
□ Self-evaluation
□ Formal evaluation
□ No assessment is needed
□ Other (*please specify*) _____

SUPPORT FOR PARTICIPATION

28. Which of the following types of resources, if any, does your Department/Team/Organisation allocate specifically to support children and young people's participation?
Please tick all that apply
□ A separate funding stream/budget
□ Dedicated staff time
□ Dedicated admin. time
□ Use of premises/office space
□ Training and events costs
□ Transport and other expenses for children and young people
□ No resources specifically allocated to children and young people
□ Other (*please specify*) _____

29. Your Department/Team/Organisation's approach
Please tick the appropriate response(s)
□ Our Department/Team/Organisation values the right of children and young people to be involved in decision-making.
□ Our Department/Team/Organisation understands the practical implications of involving children and young people in decision-making.

□ Our Department/Team/Organisation would like to involve children and young people more, but we don't have the resources.
□ Our Department/Team/Organisation would like to involve children and young people more, but we don't know how to.
□ Children and young people's participation is integral to the work of our Department/Team/Organisation.
□ Our services have improved as a result of children and young people's participation
□ Our Department/Team/Organisation always ensures that children and young people know about the results of their involvement.
□ Our Department/Team/Organisation has no interest in involving children and young people in our decision-making processes.
□ Our Department/Team/Organisation has no need to involve children and young people in our decision-making processes.

ATTITUDES AND PERCEPTIONS

Please state the extent to which you agree or disagree with each of the following statements about decision-making:

30. *Children and young people have a right to be involved in public decision-making.*
Strongly disagree □   Disagree □   Unsure □   Agree □   Strongly Agree □

31. *Children and young people should only be involved in decision-making where there is clear evidence about the benefits of their involvement.*
Strongly disagree □   Disagree □   Unsure □   Agree □   Strongly Agree □

32. *It is too difficult to involve younger children in decision-making.*
Strongly disagree □   Disagree □   Unsure □   Agree □   Strongly Agree □

33. *There are no decisions which children and young people cannot be involved in, providing they are properly supported.*
Strongly disagree □   Disagree □   Unsure □   Agree □   Strongly Agree □

34*. There are some decisions which children and young people cannot be involved in.*
Strongly disagree □   Disagree □   Unsure □   Agree □   Strongly Agree □

35. Is there anything else you want to highlight about your experience of or attitudes towards participation by children and young people?
_____
_____
_____
_____

THANK YOU!

Appendix C:
Survey of Student Councils

This questionnaire will take about 15 minutes to fill in.

SCHOOL AND STUDENT COUNCIL DETAILS

1. School name and address _____

_____

2. Where is your school located?
Connaught □   Leinster □   Munster □   Ulster □

3. Is your school located in?   Urban area □   Rural area □

4. Is your school?   All boys □   All girls □   Co-ed □

5. How many years is your Student Council up and running? _____

6. How many young people are on your Student Council? _____

WHO IS INVOLVED IN YOUR STUDENT COUNCIL?

7. How many girls are on your Student Council? _____

8. How many boys are on your Student Council? _____

9. What is the age of the youngest person on your Student Council? _____

10. What is the age of the oldest person on your Student Council? _____

11. How many Student Council members are in the following years?
1st year _____   2nd year _____   3rd year _____   TY_____   5th year_____   6th year _____

HOW DOES YOUR STUDENT COUNCIL WORK?

12a. How do young people get involved in your Student Council?
(*You can tick more than one box*)
Picked by a teacher/Principal   □
Elected by other students   □

12b.Other _____

_____

13. How often does your Student Council meet?
Never □   Once every few months □   Once a month □
Once every two weeks □   Once a week □   More than once a week □

14. Does your Student Council decide on its own activities?

Always □   Sometimes □   Rarely □   Never □

15. Does your Student Council consult with students in your school on important issues?

Always □   Sometimes □   Rarely □   Never □

16a. Who attends your Student Council meetings?(*You can tick more than one box*)

Student Council members   □
Other students   □
Student Council Liaison Teacher   □
Other teachers   □
School Principal   □

16b. Other _____

17a. Who usually chairs your Student Council meetings?

Student Council Chairperson   □
Student Council members   □
Student Council Liaison Teacher   □
Other teacher   □
School Principal   □

17b. Other _____

WHAT DOES YOUR STUDENT COUNCIL DO?

18a. What do you see as the main roles of your Student Council?

(*You can tick more than one box*)

To make sure students have a say   □
To make your school a better place to be in □
To help with the smooth running of your school □
To consult with school management   □
To have a say in school policies/rules   □
To raise awareness on important issues   □
To organise and help with school events   □
To help other students   □

18b. Other_____

19a. Has your Student Council ever been represented on other school committees (e.g. Board of Management Committee)?

Yes □   No □

19b. If you stated Yes, please specify_____
_____

20a. Is your Student Council involved in activities with the local community (e.g. voluntary work, fundraising)?

Yes □   No □

20b. If you stated Yes, please specify_____

RELATIONSHIPS AND COMMUNICATION WITH OTHERS

21. How would you describe the relationship between your Student Council and the following people?

Your School Principal	Excellent □	Very Good □	Good □	Fair □	Poor □
Teachers	Excellent □	Very Good □	Good □	Fair □	Poor □
Other students	Excellent □	Very Good □	Good □	Fair □	Poor □

22. With regard to working with other students in your school, does your Student Council?
(*You can tick more than one box*)

Form sub-committees	□
Report to classes as student representatives	□
Invite students to submit ideas to the Student Council	□
Invite students to meetings to present ideas	□
Survey students to get their opinions	□
Update your notice board regularly	□

YOUR STUDENT COUNCIL AND DECISION-MAKING

23a. Is your Student Council involved in decision making with school management?
Always □   Sometimes □   Rarely □   Never □

23b. Please give examples _____
_____

24a. Are the views of your Student Council taken seriously by your school management?
Always □   Sometimes □   Rarely □   Never □

24b. Please give examples _____
_____

25a. Does your Student Council make decisions on its own?
Always □   Sometimes □   Rarely □   Never □

25b. Please give examples _____
_____

26a. In terms of school rules and regulations (e.g. the Code of Behaviour), has your Student Council ever been:

Consulted	Yes □	No □
Responsible for changes	Yes □	No □

26b. Please give examples _____
_____

27a. In terms of school policies (e.g. healthy eating policies, bullying policies), has your Student Council ever been:

Consulted	Yes □	No □
Responsible for changes	Yes □	No □

27b. Please give examples _____
_____

DIFFICULTIES AND ACHIEVEMENTS

28a. What are the main difficulties for your Student Council?
(*You can tick more than one box*)

Lack of interest in the Student Council among students	□
Lack of understanding of what the Student Council does among students	□
Getting students involved in the Student Council	□
Lack of training for Student Council members	□
Poor attendance at meetings	□
Younger students (e.g. 1st and 2nd years) are not involved	□
Lack of general support for the Student Council from school management	□
Not taken seriously by school management	□

28b. Other (*please explain*) _____
_____

29a. What are the main achievements of your Student Council?

Improvement of school atmosphere	□
A more caring school	□
Decrease in bullying in your school	□
Improvement in student behaviour in your school	□
Improvement of relations between students and staff	□
Development of communication skills among Student Council members	□
Development of leadership skills among Student Council members	□
New learning opportunities for Student Council members	□
Increased responsibility among Student Council members	□

29b. Other (*please explain*) _____
_____

30. How would you rate the overall impact of your Student Council?
High impact □   Medium impact □   Low impact □   No impact □

SUPPORTS/ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

31. Do you use the Student Council Diary to assist in planning/organising your Student Council?
Yes □   No □   Don't know what this is □

32. What supports/training do you think would help to improve how the Student Council is working in your school?
_____
_____

33. Do you have any additional comments?
_____
_____
_____
_____

THANK YOU FOR TAKING THE TIME TO FILL IN THIS QUESTIONNAIRE!

Appendix D:

Survey of Student Council Liaison Teachers

1. **How long have you been a Student Council Liaison Teacher?**
   Appointed this year   □
   2 years   □
   3 years   □
   4 years   □
   5 years or more   □

2. **Is the Student Council Resource Pack used in your school?**
   Yes □   No □

3. **Is the CSPE Resource Pack 'Student Councils in Schools' used in your school?**
   Yes □   No □

4. **Have you availed of the support or training offered by the Student Council Support Service?**
   Yes □   No □

5. **If you answered Yes, what services/support have you used?**
   In-service day   □
   Evening workshops   □
   Student Council training   □
   School visit   □
   Phone advice   □
   Student Council Liaison Teacher folder   □

6. **What support would you require to help improve how the Student Council operates in your school?**
   _____
   _____
   _____

Thanks for taking the time to fill in this survey

Appendix E:

Schools that took part in the Student Council Survey, by county

COUNTY	SCHOOL NAME AND ADDRESS
Carlow	St. Leo's College, Dublin Road, Co. Carlow
Cavan	Cavan Institute, Co. Cavan
	St. Aidan's Comprehensive School, Cootehill, Co. Cavan
Clare	Ennis Community College, Harmony Row, Ennis, Co. Clare
	St. Joseph's School. Tulla, Co. Clare
	Mary Immaculate Secondary School, Lisdoonvarna, Co. Clare
	Kilrush Community School, Kilrush, Co. Clare
Cork	Kinsale Community School, Kinsale, Co. Cork
	Presentation Secondary, Mitchelstown, Co. Cork
	Presentation Secondary School, Joe Murphy Road, Ballyphehane, Cork City
	Davis College, Summerhill, Mallow, Co. Cork
	Presentation College, Mardyke, Cork
	Coláiste Muire, Bishop's Street, Cobh, Co. Cork
	Douglas Community School, Clermont Avenue, Douglas, Cork
	St. Aloysius School, Sharman Crawford Street, Cork City
	Bandon Grammar School, Bandon, Co. Cork
	Maria Immaculata Community College, Dunmanway, Co. Cork
	CBS Secondary School, Charleville, Co. Cork.
	St. Aloysius College, Carrigtwohill, Co. Cork
	Carrigaline Community School, Waterpark, Carrigaline, Cork
	Midleton College, Connolly Street, Midleton, Co. Cork
	St. Mary's High School, Midleton, Co. Cork
	Nagle Rice Secondary School, Doneraile, Co. Cork
	North Monastery Secondary School, Christian Brothers, Cork
	Scoil Bernadette, Cope Foundation, Montenotte, Cork
	St. Francis College, Rochestown, Cork
	St. Mary's Secondary School, Smiths Road, Charleville, Co. Cork
	Loreto Secondary School, Fermoy, Co. Cork
	Clonakilty Community College, Cork
	Colaiste an Spioraid Naoimh, Bishopstown, Cork
	St. Brogan's College, Kilbrogan, Bandon, Co. Cork
	Pobalscoil na Tríonóide, Youghal, Co. Cork
	Patrician Academy, Mallow, Co. Cork
	Colaiste Treasa, Kanturk, Cork
	St. Peter's Community School, Passage West, Co. Cork
	Terence MacSwiney Community College, Hollyhill, Knocknaheeny, Co. Cork
	Rossa College, Skibbereen, Co. Cork.
	St. Gobanan's College, Bantry, Co. Cork
Donegal	Coláiste Ailigh, High Road, Letterkenny, Co. Donegal
	Loreto Community School, Milford, Co. Donegal
	Royal and Prior Comprehensive School, Raphoe, Co. Donegal
	St. Eunan's College, Letterkenny, Co. Donegal

Donegal (*continued*)	St. Columba's Comprehensive School, Glenties, Co. Donegal
	Loreto Secondary School, Letterkenny, Co. Donegal
	Moville Community College, Carrownaff, Moville, Co. Donegal
	Carrick Vocational School, Carrick, Co. Donegal
	Crana College, Crana Road, Buncrana, Co. Donegal
	Gairmscoil Chu Uladh, Beal an Átha Mor, Clochan, Leifear, Co. Dhun na nGall
Dublin	Oatlands College, Stillorgan, Co. Dublin
	St. Tiernan's Community School, Parkvale, Balally, Dublin 16
	Jobstown Community College, Jobstown, Tallaght, Dublin 24
	Portmarnock Community School, Carrickhill Road, Portmarnock, Co. Dublin
	Colaiste Bride, New Road, Clondalkin, Dublin 22
	Skerries Community College, Skerries, Co. Dublin
	St. Joseph's College, Presentation Convent, Lucan, Co. Dublin
	St. Kevin's Community College, Fonthill Road, Clondalkin, Dublin 22
	Holy Child School, Military Road, Killiney, Co. Dublin
	Hartstown Community School, Hartstown Road, Dublin 15
	Colaiste Choilm CBS, Swords, Co. Dublin
	Gaelcholaiste Reachrann, Domhnach Míde, Baile Átha Cliath 13
	St. Columba's College, Whitechurch, Dublin 16
	Presentation Secondary School, Warrenmount, Dublin 8
	Sandford Park School, Ranelagh, Dublin 6
	St. Benildus College, Upper Kilmacud Road, Stillorgan, Co. Dublin
	St. Killian's DSDE, Roebuck Road, Clonskeagh, Dublin 14
	St. Mark's Community School, Fortunestown Lane, Tallaght, Dublin 24
	Grange Community College, Donaghmeade, Dublin 13
	Coolmine Community School, Blanchardstown, Dublin 15
	Rosmini Community School, Drumcondra, Dublin 9
	Alexandra College, Milltown, Dublin 6
	Coláiste de hÍde, Bóthar Chaisleáin Thigh Mothain, Tamhlacht, Baile Átha Cliath 24
	St. Dominic's College, Cabra, Dublin 7
	Loreto College Foxrock, Foxrock, Dublin 18
	Loreto College Swords, Swords, Co. Dublin
	St. Louis High School, Rathmines, Dublin 6
	Coláiste Éanna CBS, Ballyroan Road, Ballyroan, Dublin 16
	St. Paul's College, Raheny, Dublin
	Malahide Community School, Broomfield, Malahide, Co. Dublin
	Fingal Community College, Seatown Road, Swords, Co. Dublin
	Castleknock Community College, Castleknock, Dublin
	Mercy Secondary, Inchicore, Dublin 8
	Notre Dame Secondary School, Upper Churchtown Road, Churchtown, Dublin
	Balbriggan Community College, Pineridge Chapel Street, Balbriggan, Co. Dublin
	Marian College, Lansdowne Road, Ballsbridge, Dublin 4
	Belvedere College SJ, 6 Great Denmark Street, Dublin 1
	Trinity Comprehensive School, Ballymun, Dublin 9
	Loreto High School Beaufort, Grange Road, Rathfarnham, Dublin 14
	John Scottus School, 72-76 Morehampton Road, Donnybrook, Dublin 4
	Colaiste Mhuire, Bóthar Rath Tó, Baile Átha Cliath 7
	St. Michael's College, Ailesbury Road, Dublin 4
	Loreto Abbey, Dalkey, Co. Dublin
	Lucan Community College, Esker Drive, Lucan, Co. Dublin
	Sutton Park School, St. Fintan's Road, Sutton, Dublin 13
	Loreto College, St. Stephen's Green, 52 St. Stephen's Green, Dublin 2

Dublin (*continued*)	St. Dominic's Secondary School, Ballyfermot, Kylemore Road, Dublin 10
Galway	Galway Community College, Galway
	Glenamaddy Community School, Church Street, Glenamaddy, Co. Galway
	Scoil Chuimsitheach Chiaráin, An Cheathrú Rua, Co. na Gaillimhe
	Seamount College, Kinvara, Co. Galway.
	Presentation Secondary School, Presentation Road, Galway
	Colaiste Einde, Threadneedle Road, Salthill, Galway
	St. Cuan's College, Ballinasloe, Co. Galway
	Presentation College, Currylea, Tuam, Co. Galway
	Colaiste an Chreagan, Mountbellew, Ballinasloe, Co. Galway
	St. Mary's College, St. Mary's Road, Galway
	St. Paul's Secondary School, Oughterard, Co. Galway
Kerry	Tralee Community College, Clash, Tralee, Co. Kerry
	Pobailscoil Inbhear Sceine, Kenmare, Co. Kerry
	St. Brigid's Secondary School, New Street, Killarney, Co. Kerry
	CBS, The Green, Tralee, Co. Kerry
	KIllarney Commuity College, New Road, Killarney, Co. Kerry
	Coláiste na Sceilge, Valentia Road, Cahersiveen, Co. Kerry
	Mercy Secondary School, Mounthawk, Tralee, Co. Kerry
	Tarbert Comprehensive School, Tarbert, Co. Kerry
	Scoil Phobail Sliabh Luachra, Rathmore, Co. Kerry
Kildare	St. Farnan's Post Primary, Prosperous, Co. Kildare
	Scoil Dara, Kilcock, Co. Kildare
	St. Joseph's Academy, Kildare Town
	Scoil Mhuire, Clane, Co. Kildare
	Colaiste Chiarain, Celbridge Road, Leixlip, Co. Kildare
	Athy College, Tomard, Athy, Co. Kildare
	Maynooth Post Primary, Moyglare Road, Maynooth, Co. Kildare
	Holy Family Secondary School, Naas Road, Newbridge, Co. Kildare
	Clongowes Wood College, Clane, Co. Kildare
Kilkenny	St. Brigid's College, Callan, Co. Kilkenny
	Loreto Secondary School, Kilkenny
	Presentation Secondary School, Loughboy, Co. Kilkenny
	Castlecomer Community School, Co. Kilkenny
	Scoil Aireagail, Ballyhale, Co. Kilkenny.
Laois	St. Fergal's College, Rathdowney, Co. Laois
Limerick	Scoil Pól, Kilfinane, Co. Limerick
	Salesian College, Copsewood, Pallaskeny, Co. Limerick
	Scoil Carmel, O'Connell Avenue, Limerick
	Vocational School, Abbeyfeale, Co. Limerick
	Hazelwood College, Dromcollogher, Co. Limerick
	Gaelcholáiste Luimnigh, Sir Harry's Mall, Limerick City
	Laurel Hill Secondary School, South Circular Road, Limerick
	Villiers School, North Circular Road, Limerick
	Coláiste Mhuire, Askeaton, Co. Limerick
	Colaiste Iosaef, Kilmallock, Co. Limerick
	Salesian Secondary School, Fernbank, North Circular Road, Limerick

Longford	Moyne Community School, Moyne, Co. Longford
	Ballymahon Vocational, Ballymahon, Co. Longford
	Mercy Secondary School, Ballymahon, Co. Longford
	Templemicheal College, Longford
Louth	O'Fiaich College, Dublin Road, Dundalk, Co. Louth
	Saint Mary's Diocesan School, Drogheda, Co. Louth
	Sacred Heart School, Sunnyside, Drogheda, Co. Louth
	Ardee Community School, Ardee, Co. Louth
	St. Vincent's Secondary School, Seatown Place, Dundalk, Co. Louth
Mayo	Colaiste Muire, Tuar Mhic Eadaigh, Co. Maigh Eo
	St. Louis Community School, Kiltimagh, Co. Mayo
	Jesus and Mary Secondary School, Gortnor Abbey, Crossmolina, Co. Mayo
	Sacred Heart School, Westport, Co. Mayo
	McHale College, Achill, Co. Mayo
	St. Joseph's Secondary School, Charlestown, Co. Mayo
	Scoil Muire agus Padraig, Swinford, Co. Mayo
	Sancta Maria College, Louisburgh, Co. Mayo
	Davitt College, Springfield, Castlebar, Co. Mayo
Meath	St. Peter's College, Dunboyne, Co. Meath
	St. Joseph's Secondary School, Navan, Co. Meath
	O'Carolan College, Nobber, Co. Meath
	Loreto Secondary School, St. Michael's, Navan, Co. Meath
	Ashbourne Community School, 1 Deerpark, Ashbourne, Co. Meath
	Scoil Mhuire, Convent of Mercy, Trim, Co. Meath
	Coláiste Pobail Ráth Chairn, Baile Átha Buí, Co. na Mí
	Athboy Community School, Athboy, Co. Meath
Monaghan	Inver College, Carrickmacross, Co. Monaghan
	Coláiste Oiriall, Tír Chianáin, Muineachán, Co. Muineacháin
	St. Louis Secondary School, Monaghan Town
Offaly	Coláiste Naomh Cormac, Kilcormac, Co. Offaly
Roscommon	Elphin Community College, Elphin, Co. Roscommon
	CBS Roscommon, Abbeytown, Galway Road, Roscommon Town
Sligo	Sligo Grammar School, The Mall, Sligo
	Ursuline College, Finisklin Road, Sligo
	St. Mary's College, Ballisodare, Co. Sligo
Tipperary	Presentation Secondary School, Clonmel, Co. Tipperary
	Borrisokane CC, Borrisokane, Co. Tipperary
	Scoil Ruain, Killenaule, Co. Tipperary
	CBS High School Clonmel, Clonmel, Co. Tipperary
	Coláiste Mhuire Co-Ed, Castlemeadows, Thurles, Co. Tipperary
	Patrician Presentation Secondary School, Fethard, Co. Tipperary
	Loreto, Clonmel, Co. Tipperary
	Coláiste Dún Iascaigh, Cahir, Co. Tipperary

Waterford	Stella Maris, Pond Road, Tramore, Co. Waterford
	Ard Scoil na nDeise, Convent Road, Dungarvan, Co. Waterford
	St. Paul's Community College, Lisduggan, Co. Waterford
	De La Salle College, Newtown, Co. Waterford
Westmeath	Columba College, Killucan, Co. Westmeath
	St. Aloysius College, The Park, Athlone, Co. Westmeath
	Castlepollard Community College, Castlepollard, Co. Westmeath
	Moate Community School , Main Street, Moate, Co. Westmeath
	Our Lady's Bower, Retreat Road, Athlone, Co. Westmeath
	St. Joseph's Secondary School, Rochfortbridge, Co. Westmeath
Wexford	Gorey Community School, Gorey, Co. Wexford
	FCJ Secondary School, Bunclody, Co. Wexford
	Colaiste Eamon Ris, Thomas Street, Wexford
	Colaiste an Atha, Kilmuckridge, Gorey, Co. Wexford
Wicklow	St. Killian's Community School, Ballywaltrim, Bray, Co. Wicklow
	St. Gerard's, Thornhill Road, Bray, Co. Wicklow
	East Glendalough School, Station Road, Wicklow Town
	Loreto Secondary School, Vevay Road, Bray, Co. Wicklow
	Coláiste Chraobh Abhann, Kilcoole, Co. Wicklow
	Dominican College Wicklow, Convent Road, Wicklow Town
	Colaiste Bhride, Carnew, Co. Wicklow
	St. Mary's College, Arklow, Co. Wicklow
	St. Thomas' Community College, Novara Avenue, Bray, Co. Wicklow
	Arklow Community College, Collgreany Road, Arklow, Co. Wicklow