

Youth Work Ireland Youth Participation Policy



A federal policy for whole organisational change

October 2015

Youth Work Ireland

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A Federal Policy for Whole Organisation Change

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Youth Work Ireland

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Foreword from the President of Youth Work Ireland

It is with great pride and excitement that I welcome **the Youth Participation Policy, A Federal Policy for Whole Organisation Change** into the ongoing development of Youth Work Ireland.

It has long been a vision of Youth Work Ireland to strengthen young people's roles throughout the various structures of the federation and to facilitate real participation.

Our AGM in 2014 saw a unanimous decision supporting a new panel for the national board specifically for young people. This means that the future governance of the federation will be stewarded with representation from all of our members....Young People, Volunteers and Staff.

Importantly this policy is a reflection of the excellent standard of youth participation that already exists throughout the federation and provides a clear roadmap of how to sustain and develop this essential practice. This policy is also underpinned by the vision, mission and values of Youth Work Ireland. This is a great opportunity for us all to establish a new way of thinking and working together to ensure the best opportunities exist for young people in our communities throughout Ireland.

Youth Work Ireland's vision is a world full of possibilities for all young people. This policy provides an extremely important framework for us all so that we can take on this new direction in a coherent, considered and respectful fashion. Change can often expose challenges that can be difficult to overcome. Change can often expose new opportunities that previously were never noticed or considered. This policy will be an essential tool in guiding us in our understanding of what 'participation' means and how to practically achieve it in a genuine and meaningful way.

This will guide us in line with national and international best practice standards and importantly provide an opportunity for Youth Work Ireland to lead the way in showing that young people can govern, can make important decisions and can successfully lead the largest youth work organisation in the country.

*Together with Young People we learn tools for life, foster dreams,
offer hope and realise our greatest expectations.*

Youth Work Ireland Mission 2015-2018

Foreword from the Youth Work Ireland National Youth Action Group

The following document sets out how young people can participate within Youth Work Ireland (YWI) but we want to discuss why we feel it's important that young people and member youth services should participate in decisions within their youth service.

Globally, it is seen as a fundamental right of a child, to contribute to decisions that affect them, as seen in article 12 of the UNCRC. From our involvement in the National Youth Action Group (NYAG) and YWI Board of Directors we see the value of young people being involved in decision-making of the organisation on a national level, such as; the contribution of the NYAG to the national youth strategy and the political briefing, also running the workshops at the National Consensus Conference.

As young people get involved in local youth groups they begin to engage more significantly with the decision making process behind these groups, as seen in Tipperary Regional Youth Service (TRYs) Junior Board of Management and Clare Youth Service (CYS) Younger Voices, to name just a few.

It is seen on a global, national and local level that as young people are getting involved in decision-making, that these young people are adding value to the process. As the biggest youth organisation in the country, it is important that we set out a minimum standard for our member youth services to work from.

We would like to thank you for taking the views of young people seriously and for making this policy a reality for young people in your youth service.

Yours sincerely,

Youth Work Ireland National Youth Action Group

Executive Summary

This policy represents an ambitious agenda for ensuring that young people are involved meaningfully in all decisions that affect them throughout Youth Work Ireland. The ratification of this policy will have implications for resources, governance and everyday work within Youth Work Ireland.

In addition to our determination to improve the involvement of young people in decision-making within our organisation, this policy will further our work to support young people in becoming involved in decisions that affect them in their communities and in wider society. Taken together, these changes will have consequences for every part of our federation and require ongoing consideration and attention.

Youth Participation is not a new concept for Youth Work Ireland or Member Youth Services. This policy is not underpinned by new beliefs. Rather the objectives set out in this policy are based on developments in external policy and ongoing improvements in our own understanding and expertise of youth participation. These new developments make possible the changes proposed in this policy, the political will of the entire federation will make these a reality.

This policy aims to create a minimum standard for young people's role in decision making within the Youth Work Ireland federation. However, it is wholly acknowledged that many Member Youth Services are far exceeding the practice standard set out in this document. In this way, we see that ratification of this policy as setting out the baseline only. It is not intended to impede some Member Youth Services to go beyond the four strategic objectives. The development of an A – Z guide for youth participation in conjunction with a working group will better establish what the optimum goal for young people's participation in decision-making is.

This policy is guided by the *National Strategy on Children and Youth People's Participation in Decision-Making 2015-2020* and Lundy's model of participation.

The objectives of this policy:

- ✧ To give Member Youth Services (MYS) a framework on youth participation to work within, which is easily adapted to suit their service;
- ✧ To give youth workers and volunteers the tools and knowledge on youth participation work to empower them in their youth participation work;
- ✧ That young people using the MYS feel they have meaningful ways to engage in the decision making structures of their youth service or club.



Background and Context to this Policy

Vision

Youth Work Ireland's vision is of a world full of possibilities for all young people.

Mission

Together with young people we learn tools for life, foster dreams, offer hope and realise our greatest expectations.

The Youth Work Ireland Strategic Plan

This Strategic Plan provides a planning framework for our entire federal organisation to ensure all young people can have access to a youth service. A process of alignment of our members' strategic plans in terms of timing and content has already begun. This will strengthen the reach, impact, connectedness and development of the federation.

We have an ambitious agenda in relation to youth participation which not only seeks to involve young people in making decisions within our organisation, but which works towards young people participating more fully in decisions in their own lives, in our practice, their communities and in Irish society and beyond. We are guided by Article 12 of the UNCRC in all our work in this area.

The Strategic Plan set out Youth Work Ireland's commitment to youth participation going forward. This policy aims to make set out this ambitious commitment in concrete and

practical terms. This policy document will then be supported by an A – Z guide and training plan to make these commitments a reality for Member Youth Services.

For the purpose of this policy, in line with the strategic policy, we define a “young person” as a person between 10 and 25 years of age.

Background to Policy Update

Youth Work Ireland published its “Youth Participation Policy: making our beliefs real” in 2010. The emphasis in this document was the need for Youth Proofing and finding appropriate ways to engage in participation work. Since the publication of that policy there have been a number of significant developments within the federation and the national context. As a result of these changes it was felt that there was a need to update this policy. Within the Youth Work Ireland federation there have been changes to the governance structures to ensure the increased participation of young people in decision-making of the organisation. These include:

- ✧ The creation of the board’s sub-group the National Youth Action Group (the Youth Panel)
- ✧ The inclusion of a provision for at least four members of the board of directors to be young members¹
- ✧ The promotion of youth participation is a strategic objective of the organisation as set out in the Strategic Plan
- ✧ The change to the Memorandum of Articles to allow voting rights for young people at the Youth Work Ireland AGM

These changes ensure that there are mechanisms for getting the views of young people in high level decision-making of the federation.

For the first time, Youth Work Ireland has a whole federation strategic plan which is being implemented by all MYS. This new strategic plan places a strong emphasis on Youth Participation which is Aim 3 of the plan:

“We have an ambitious agenda in relation to youth participation which not only seeks to involve young people in making decisions within our organisation, but which works towards young people participating more fully in decisions in their own lives, in our practice, their communities and in Irish society and beyond. We are guided by Article 12 of the UNCRC in all our work in this area”

The aim of this policy is to set out a list of priority areas for MYS to implement at local level in order to realise this ambitious agenda on youth participation.

¹ Please see guidance note on young people’s participation on the board for details on this

National and International Context

Young people have a right to have a say on matters which affect them. This right is enshrined under Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Ireland has signed and ratified this convention and by doing so has committed to finding ways to include children and young people in decision-making.

In June 2015 the Government launched their National Strategy on Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-Making 2015 – 2020.

The National Strategy outlines the following objectives and priority areas for action:

1. Children and young people will have a voice in decisions made in their local communities.
2. Children and young people will have a voice in decision-making in early education, schools and the wider formal and non-formal education systems.
3. Children and young people will have a voice in decisions that affect their health and well-being, including on the health and social services delivered to them.
4. Children and young people will have a voice in the Courts and legal system.

The government's action plan includes all government departments and local government. Youth work is linked to the young people having a voice in decision-making in their local communities under priority one and the non-formal education element under priority two of the strategy.

In March 2015 Youth Work Ireland conducted four consultations with young people and youth workers from the MYS. From these Networking and Learning events with MYS it was clear that youth workers and volunteers need to be supported with the right tools and information to put the right strategies in place in their clubs and youth services in order to get the views of young people on the day-to-day activities and decisions being made in their clubs and youth services.

What is Youth Participation in a Youth Work Context?

As the word "participation" features in the everyday work of youth workers and volunteers across the Youth Work Ireland Federation, youth participation in the context of youth work requires some clarification and explanation. This policy is concerned with a very specific meaning of youth participation as discussed below, though other meanings of the word participation are valuable and indeed foundational to youth work.

The everyday attendance of young people in youth work activities is termed as participation and indeed we complete forms termed "participation reports" to record these activities. Consideration of the involvement of young people in youth work activities is an important issue, but not the concern of this document.

Here, youth participation is the term given to the practice of creating space and opportunities for young people to have a say in decisions which affect their lives. Although “youth participation” is not explicitly mentioned in the UNCRC, it is acknowledged by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child as the term given to conceptualising Article 12 of the convention². Importantly, our concern here is for the deliberate, whole-system process to ensure that young people are empowered to be involved in decisions which affect every aspect of their lives.

In this way, our use of the term ‘Youth Participation’ is distinct from the ‘taking part’ that occurs in everyday youth work. In everyday youth work, the central focus is the empowerment of young people. The development of the capacity of young people to engage in participatory decision-making in group contexts is both a process and outcome of empowerment in youth work³. Youth participation can be said to be an emergent from the process of youth work.

Article 12 of the UNCRC

Article 12 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child provides:

“1. States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.
2. For this purpose the child shall in particular be provided the opportunity to be heard in any judicial and administrative proceedings affecting the child, either directly, or through a representative or an appropriate body, in a manner consistent with the procedural rules of national law.”⁴

In essence Article 12 says that Governments who ratify the UNCRC have to find ways to get children and young people’s views on decisions which affect their lives. It also explicitly says that young people’s views matter now – that they are “rights holders” now as young people and their views should be taken seriously now.

The Lundy Model

The model used in the *National Strategy on Children and Young People’s Participation in Decision Making 2015-2020* was developed by Professor Laura Lundy of Queens University Belfast. This is a rights-based model which conceptualises Article 12 by showing what is needed to make young people’s participation in decision-making meaningful for the young person. The four required components to make Article 12 a reality are: Space, voice, audience, and influence.

² General Comment Article 12; <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/crc/docs/AdvanceVersions/CRC-C-GC-12.pdf>

³ Bamber et al, 2014

⁴ UNCRC text; <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CRC.aspx>

These are not hierarchical in nature like Hart's Ladder of participation is⁵ but they follow a logical chronological order. Taking a non-hierarchical approach to participation is vital as it does not favour one type of participation over another. In Hart's Ladder we saw that the ultimate aim was for young people to be initiating and leading on decisions themselves without any interference of adults. In Lundy's model there is a greater value put on all types of participation and the ultimate aim is to find the appropriate level of participation in decision-making for individual young people and groups of young people on the issues which affect their lives.

What do these four components mean for Youth Work Ireland?

Space

Before engaging in any form of participation work you must have an appropriate youth-friendly space in which to conduct your work. This space should be somewhere the young people feel comfortable in. For example, a youth café can be a good location to hold meetings in as it can feel more comfortable and less formal than a meeting room. The space must also be inclusive. This means that all young people must be able to participate in that space. For example, the space must be suitable for young people with mobility issues to ensure that no one is being excluded from participating.

Voice

Have you given the young people the appropriate information to help them form their opinion on a particular issue? This is crucially important for every project, consultation or meeting where the youth service is looking for an input from young people. If a young person is co-opted on to a board of management/directors, for example, there must be effective ways to ensure that the young person understands the content of the meeting and the other members of the board must adjust their ways of working to accommodate the young person being involved. If a group have been asked to contribute to a local development plan, they must have the correct, youth friendly information at hand to help them form an opinion.

Audience

Before your youth service or club engage in youth participation work, the organisation must first decide that it's serious about listening to the views of the young people. There needs to be a discussion and understanding on which decisions can be made by young people. On matters such as the welfare and safety of young people, where adults have to make the ultimate decision, adults should be prepared to listened to the views of the young people and consider their views.

⁵ Hart's model was based on the idea that children and young people's involvement in decision-making starts assigned but informed participation. The ultimate aim in Hart's ladder is to reach the point where children and young people are initiating and sharing decisions with adults: *Children's Participation: from tokenism to citizenship* by Roger A. Hart, 1992, UNICEF International Child Development Centre, Florence, Italy. See: http://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/pdf/childrens_participation.pdf

Influence

If your youth service or club are engaging in youth participation work, the organisation must have a willingness to make changes in your service/club according to the views of the young people, where appropriate. Feedback to the young people on how their views influenced the decisions made is an important element of youth participation work.

The figure below is from the National Strategy on Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-making 2015 - 2020 and shows a visual of Professor Lundy's model of participation:



(This model was designed by Professor Laura Lundy and taken from Department of Children and Youth Affairs (2015), *National Strategy on Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-Making 2015-2020*, Dublin: Government Press)

The National Strategy on Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-making 2015 - 2020 sub-group and Professor Lundy developed a checklist for participation (see figure 2 below) to help practitioners put the model into practice in their work. This gives a list of questions which should be considered before a piece of participation work is undertaken. In this we see exactly what is meant by space, voice, audience and influence and that the ultimate aim is to provide the young person or young people with an appropriate way to express their views and that those views will be given due weight.



(Department of Children and Youth Affairs (2015), National Strategy on Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-Making 2015-2020, Dublin: Government Press)

In the Networking and Learning consultations with young people it became resoundingly clear that this is the appropriate model for Youth Work Ireland to use: the young people themselves identified the elements of "space, voice, audience and influence" as being important to aid in participating in their clubs and youth service in a meaningful way.



Developing an Effective Policy to Guarantee Whole Organisational Change

Our actions in youth work need to be informed by evidence; we can take this evidence from experience and ideas of young people, our own practice experience and evidence from research, policy and theory. This policy is based on evidence from all of these areas. Given the subject matter of the policy, evidence from young people has been prioritised.

Given the current wealth of research, policy and experience in youth participation work in Ireland, some confidence can be had that the strategies and actions identified below will be effective supports for a whole-organisation change process within Youth Work Ireland.

Need for whole organisation change

Objective five of the National Strategy on Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-making 2015-2020 outlines the importance and need for whole organisational change if we are going to successfully have young people's views taken seriously on decisions that affect their lives.

The following is taken from the National Strategy:

“Organisational change is essential to ensuring meaningful participation by children and young people in decisions that affect them. Participation must be embedded within the infrastructure of an organisation and progress beyond one-off, discreet activities, to become an on-going embedded process. Effective participation demands a whole systems approach combining four key elements: culture, structure, practice and review.

- ☼ **Culture:** the ethos of an organisation, shared by all staff and service users, which demonstrates a commitment to participation;
- ☼ **Structure:** the planning, development and resourcing of participation evident in an organisation's structure;
- ☼ **Practice:** the ways of working, methods for involvement, skills and knowledge which enable children and young people to become involved;
- ☼ **Review:** the monitoring and evaluation systems which enable an organisation to evidence change"

(Department of Children and Youth Affairs (2015), *National Strategy on Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-Making 2015-2020*, Dublin: Government Press)

This shows us that youth participation has to be taken on by all levels of management within the organisation. The Youth Work Ireland strategic plan outlines the following objectives for youth participation:

- ☼ We will continue to ensure participation of young people in our work and governance locally, nationally and internationally;
- ☼ We will continue to promote positive images of young people;
- ☼ We will work with young people in the organisation including our *National Youth Action Group* to ensure robust participation proofing of our work;
- ☼ We will update our Participation Policy in conjunction with young people in the organisation;
- ☼ We will monitor the level of participation in decision making throughout the organisation;
- ☼ We will work in partnership to further develop Comhairle na nÓg and Dail na nÓg consistent with Ireland's support for the UNCRC along with assisting in the development of further statutory participation policies.

Consultation Process with Young People

To get the views on what young people felt they need to meaningfully have their voices listened to within their youth club or service, we conducted a consultation with 180 young people in total. The workshops were held in Carlow, Tipperary, Meath and Sligo with representatives from 16 of the 22 Member Youth Services.

The National Youth Action Group is made up of representatives from Youth Work Ireland MYS. This group was responsible for reviewing the outcomes of the consultations and prioritising the content for the policy.

Firstly, we asked the young people to work in groups and to storyboard a time in a programme or a project where they felt they were heard. Good examples of youth participation work in the MYS identified by the group include;

- ☼ The Junior Board of Tipperary Regional Youth Service
- ☼ The Youth Panel for the afterschool club in Carlow Regional Youth Service
- ☼ The Sexual Health project in Donegal Youth Service⁶

These are just three good examples among many to show us that there is an abundance of good practice happening across the federation at the moment. This policy is aimed at building on that.

The second part of the consultation was aimed at learning what the young people need from their youth worker or volunteer in order to engage in decision-making effectively. A consensus building workshop was conducted at each consultation with both young people and youth workers/volunteers with the focus question: “What do youth workers and volunteers have to know and do to involve young people in decision-making?” The purpose of the focus question was to discover exactly what young people need from their youth workers and volunteers in order to facilitate their involvement in decision making. Youth Workers and Volunteers voices were included in this part of the consultation as it was felt that it was important for them to identify what they feel they need to know and do as well as young people.

The National Youth Action Group was tasked with reviewing the information from the consensus building workshops: the following is their list, in order of priority, of the most important qualities and skills that youth workers and volunteers need to have to involve young people in decision-making⁷:

- ☼ Young people need to feel they have an equal say to the adult facilitators (this does not mean that everything they say can happen or should happen but rather that when a decision is to be made by a young person or a group of young people that then the facilitator takes what the young people are saying to be as important as the adults views);
- ☼ Youth workers and volunteers need to give young people independence on decisions (i.e. youth workers and volunteers should not influence what the young people are saying);
- ☼ Youth workers and volunteers have to show that they are impartial and non-judgemental (so that all young people feel accepted and that they can say their true opinion without feeling judged for it);
- ☼ Youth workers and volunteers need to have effective structures (such as junior boards, forums, reference panels, a way for young people to make a complaint about the youth service);

⁶ These are the top three as prioritised by the National Youth Action Group. Please see Appendix one for a list of links to more information on the good practice examples collected through these consultations.

⁷ As prioritised by the National Youth Action Group in August 2015; for full list see Appendix two. The A – Z working group will develop a similar list for young people.

- ☼ Youth workers and volunteers need to have an awareness of local issues (in particular the issues which directly affect young people);
- ☼ Youth workers and volunteers need to ensure that everyone gets listened to and has the opportunity to have a say;
- ☼ Youth workers and volunteers need to recognise that young people can have fun and be responsible at the same time.

It was clear from the consensus building workshop that the main things concerning the young people is how they are treated when engaging in youth participation activities. They need their youth workers and volunteers to take their views seriously and to treat them with respect. There was broad agreement that the youth workers and volunteers need to have a good mix of facilitation methods and participatory activities to be able to meet the needs of young people.

Main finding from Consultation Process:

Young people said they need their youth service to provide a safe environment where they feel the youth worker or volunteer is going to listen to them, respect their views and for their views to be acted on (where appropriate).

The outcome of the consultation with young people in MYS further strengthens the use of the Lundy model as what was said by the young people clearly links back to the four elements necessary to realise Article 12: “space”, “voice”, “audience” and “influence”.

Goal, focus and objective of this policy

- ☼ Young people using Youth Work Ireland services feel there are ways in their youth club or youth service to have their voice heard and to be part of the decision-making structures;
- ☼ The fundamental goal is to have a relevant, up-to-date policy in place which will be a useful tool for all MYS and that meets the needs of young people in the youth service;
- ☼ This policy is framed within the national and international context in terms of children’s rights, the definition and the model of participation being used;
- ☼ This policy aims to increase the understanding of youth participation in the context of Youth Work Ireland work;
- ☼ In this policy we are focused on practical ways to include young people in decision-making structures in youth clubs and youth services;
- ☼ A fundamental objective for the federation is to have a youth participation strategy which can be easily utilised at all levels: national, local and club.

The objectives of this policy:

- ☼ To give MYS a framework on youth participation to work within which is easily adapted to suit their service;
- ☼ To give youth workers and volunteers the tools and knowledge on youth participation work to empower them in their work;
- ☼ That young people using the MYS feel they have meaningful ways to engage in the decision making structures of their youth service or club.



Policy Implementation and Obligations for the Youth Work Ireland Federation

YOUTH PARTICIPATION STRATEGIC PRIORITIES FOR YOUTH WORK IRELAND AND MEMBER YOUTH SERVICES:

The National Youth Action Group played an important role in prioritising the findings from the consultations with young people and in deciding the objectives of this policy. They felt that in order for the National Youth Action Group to be meaningful that there needs to be a similar decision-making structure in every MYS within the federation. This was based largely on their mixed experiences from involvement in different Member Youth Services. Some have always had a youth participation structure built in to their youth service which has been very successful. A few members have recently become involved in a structure within their youth service. Others have no such structures at all. They all felt that having some type of panel or board in place is very important first step towards listening to the views of young people within the youth service.

They also felt that in order for that structure to be a success it is critical that every youth worker and volunteer within the federation has access to quality resources, training and support in both the setting up and execution of their work.

The third area of practice is embedding youth participation proofing into the practice of every Member Youth Service and national office (herein referred to as NO) activity or programme. This requires everybody in the organisation taking on the ethos that it is necessary and worthwhile to include young people in the decision-making process of every programme or activity carried out by MYS and NO.

The fourth area identifies Youth Work Ireland's role in enabling young people to have a voice in decisions that affect them in their communities. This will involve engaging with local government and other key decision-makers in the local community. This is strongly linked to the National Strategy on Children and Young People's Participation Decision-making 2015-2020.

YOUTH WORK IRELAND NATIONAL OFFICE AND EVERY MEMBER YOUTH SERVICE TO HAVE A STRUCTURE IN PLACE TO INVOLVE YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE DECISION MAKING OF THE ORGANISATION

Ratification of the policy means that the NO and every MYS of Youth Work Ireland must sustainably and perpetually finance, support and make governance arrangements for an identifiable dedicated structure through which young people can play a role in decision-making within the organisation. All young people within the organisation will be informed and aware of the existence, function and activities of these structures. A structure to involve young people in the decision-making of each Member Youth Service can take on many forms. For some MYS it will make more logistical sense to have a number of regional based fora in place which meet up on a biennial basis in the county while for others it will make more sense to have the one panel meet monthly in a central location. Different approaches work for different MYS and different areas. However, the principles remain the same across the board. For young people to be involved in decision-making of your organisation you need to provide them with right space, voice, audience and influence. Importantly, it should be noted that in many instances, young people involved in this capacity are involved as spokespersons for the organisation.

National Office has set up the *National Youth Action Group* as a sub-group of the board of directors. This ensures that the views of the group are heard by the appropriate decision-makers. The members feel that in order to make this group more effective for MYS, having effective structures to feed back to at local level is vital to ensuring that there are ways for young people to meaningfully participate in the decision-making of the organisation. There are already many examples of youth panels, forums, and junior boards throughout the organisation. Through achieving this objective we need to document best practice in the MYS and support them to establish effective structures locally.

SUPPORTING YOUTH PARTICIPATION PRACTICE WITHIN THE YOUTH WORK IRELAND MEMBER YOUTH SERVICES AND NATIONAL OFFICE

Ratification of the policy means that supports and resources for young people, staff and services need to be identified, developed and sustained throughout the federation in a whole-organisation manner. Youth Work Ireland has begun to develop whole-organisation support structures for important areas of work through A-Z guides which link policy to supports, resources and standard operational procedures.

To successfully embed youth participation practice in Youth Work Ireland it is critical that management level and all staff and volunteers in MYS feel adequately supported to build this practice into their work. This will involve making resources and learning tools available for Youth Work Ireland members, rolling out a training programme and induction to Youth Participation and having a designated youth participation contact person in each MYS who is supported by head office in the implementation of this policy. The provision of peer support

at a local level by the youth participation contact person would ensure that every staff member and volunteer feels supported implementing this model of practice in their work.

To support these developments tools in the form of, guidance, information and practice resources and minimal standards of service provision will be developed and implemented through an A-Z guide to youth participation, to be developed by young people, Youth Work Ireland staff and support from external experts.

EMBEDDING THE PRACTICE OF YOUTH PARTICIPATION PROOFING IN EVERY LEVEL OF ORGANISATION

Ratification of the policy means that national office as well as each member services commits to meaningfully attempt to involve young people in every decision that takes place. The Youth Work Ireland NO has already committed to involving young people in decisions that affect them through proofing its work for young people's participation. This has meant that in initiating any new piece of work we will ask if this new work will affect young people, and if so, we will seek to involve them in decisions made in relation to that work.

To ensure this becomes normal practice, management need to prioritise it, and include it an integral part of every staff meeting. In addition, it also needs to be considered from the initial stages of any new initiative within the organisation. Having a designated person in each Member Youth Service to keep track of youth participation proofing is recommended. A new youth participation proofing tool will be designed and developed with the help of a working group.

EMPOWERING YOUNG PEOPLE TO PARTICIPATE IN DECISION-MAKING IN THEIR COMMUNITY AND WIDER WORLD

Ratification of the policy means that NO, as well as each MYS, commit to supporting young people in to have a say in within their communities and the wider world. This means Youth Work Ireland has a role in supporting young people to have opportunities to engage with the decision-makers in their communities through organised activities and programmes within the MYS.

This in practice means identifying the issues that young people feel they need a say on and linking with the appropriate decision-makers in the community who have influence over such decisions. These decisions-makers include: the Local Authority Play and Recreation, Planning, Libraries, etc.), the inter-agency Children and Young People's Services Committee, the Health Service Executive, an Gardaí and schools.

Indeed the role of youth workers as a means of engaging young people in decision-making in their community has been recognised as an "enabler of voice" in the DCYA publication *Children and young people's experiences of participation in decision-making at home, in schools and in their communities*:

"Children and young people were generally dissatisfied with their opportunities to participate in their communities. However, there were also important enablers of voice...some dedicated spaces and activities, and supportive participatory attitudes and practices by adults and organisations. Through the work of their youth clubs and organisations, the adult respondents are seeking to provide a variety of participatory

mechanisms and opportunities for children and young people. These opportunities vary in nature and extent between clubs and organisations and tend to be most organised, extensive and formalised in professional youth work contexts”.⁸

The Children and Young People’s Services Committee is the inter-agency committee of key actors working in children and young people’s services. This committee offers a gateway for youth workers to establish suitable platforms for the young people in MYS to link with the right audience of decision-makers and to have an influence on matters which affect them in their communities.

The Department of Children and Youth Affairs *Comhairle na nÓg* (young people’s councils) programme provides a platform for young people aged 12 – 18 to have a say on local issues in their area. Many MYS are currently actively engaging or coordinating these councils.

⁸ Horgan, D., Forde, C., Parkes, A. and Martin, S. (2015) Children and young people’s experiences of participation in decision-making at home, in schools and in their communities. Dublin: Department of Children and Youth Affairs. Available at: www.dcyia.ie



Timeline of Implementation of Policy

Regional Directors support	September 2015
Presentation of draft policy at the Conference	October 2015
Ratification of policy at the AGM	November 2015
Working group to develop 'youth participation A – Z guide' for Youth Work Ireland	January to June 2016
Training plan developed	February 2016
Each Member Youth Service to identify a key staff link person for tracking progress on the implementation of the policy	March 2016
Member Youth Services to have youth participation structure established	December 2016
Youth Participation Proofing tool developed	June 2016
Youth Participation in the community plans developed	September 2016

Appendices

Appendix One:

“What do youth workers and volunteers have to **know** and **do** to involve young people in decision-making?”

We conducted a consensus building workshop with four different groups of young people and youth workers and volunteers. The workshops were held in Carlow, Tipperary, Meath and Sligo with representatives from 16 member youth services. We consulted with approx. 180 young people in total. The purpose of the focus question was to discover exactly what young people need from their youth workers and volunteers in order to facilitate their involvement in decision making.

The following is a synthesis of the answers to the focus question:

- ☼ Youth Workers and Volunteers need to create a welcoming environment for young people
- ☼ Youth Workers and Volunteers need to listen to young people and understand their ideas and opinions
- ☼ Youth Workers and Volunteers need to ensure that everyone gets listened to and has the opportunity to have a say
- ☼ Youth Workers and Volunteers need to communicate with young people
- ☼ Youth Workers and Volunteers need to give young people independence on decisions
- ☼ Youth Workers and Volunteers need to recognise that young people can have fun and be responsible at the same time
- ☼ Youth Workers and Volunteers need effective structures (for youth workers – ways to effectively feed into organisational level)
- ☼ Youth Workers should know about Children’s rights
- ☼ Youth Workers and Volunteers need to have an awareness of local issues
- ☼ Youth Workers and Volunteers need to give the young person safety and security
- ☼ Youth Workers and Volunteers need to be organised
- ☼ Youth Participation work requires adequate food and refreshments (need to have resources to provide this before agreeing to start a group)
- ☼ Young people need to feel they have an equal say to the adult facilitators
- ☼ Volunteers should ask young people what they want to do in their club (suggestion that they could sit down once a month to formulate an activity plan together)
- ☼ Create more opportunities for young people to meet on a regional and national level

Youth Workers behaviour towards young people is important to ensure that young people can effectively engage in decision making:

- ☼ Youth Workers and Volunteers need to have a good attitude towards young people
- ☼ Youth Workers and Volunteers need to be patient with young people
- ☼ Youth Workers and Volunteers need to trust and respect young people

- ☼ Youth Workers and Volunteers have to show that they are impartial and non-judgemental
- ☼ Youth Workers and Volunteers must know how to inspire young people
- ☼ Youth Workers and Volunteers need to have good initiative
- ☼ Youth Workers and Volunteers need to be friendly, understanding and helpful
- ☼ Youth Workers and Volunteers have a responsibility towards young people to explain their options (in terms of where they will have influence – point them in the right direction without making the decision for them)

It was clear from the consensus building workshop that the main things concerning the young people is how they are treated when engaging in youth participation activities. They want their youth workers and volunteers to take their views seriously and to treat them with respect.

There was broad agreement that the youth workers and volunteers need to have a good mix of facilitation methods and participatory activities to be able to meet the needs of young people.

Young people need a safe environment where they feel the youth worker or volunteer is going to listen to them, respect their views and act on their views.



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