

# Briefing Note on Youth Participation Structures

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## **1. Definition and purpose of child and youth participation and the key drivers of its promotion**

Including the voice of the child in decision-making is a priority for the Irish Government and the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY). This Department plays an important role in leading Government efforts to ensure that children and young people have a voice in decisions that affect their lives.

Commitments through the UNCRC ratification and the first National Children's Strategy: Our Children – Their Lives (2000) led to the first Dáil na nÓg (youth parliament) event in 2001 and the establishment of Comhairle na nÓg (youth councils) in 2002, which continue to be supported by the Department and at Local Authority level. Comhairle na nÓg is recognised as the National Structure

for young people's participation in decision-making in Ireland and is named in the current Programme for Government to ensure balanced regional development.

The Comhairle na nÓg Five Year Development Plan, published in 2021, aims to broaden the reach and influence of Comhairle na nÓg and strengthen the voice of young people at local and national levels. DCEDIY has established the National Participation Office (NPO) to work across local and national Government to build, develop and sustain structures to enable the meaningful participation of children and young people in decision making at local and national level.

## **2. Overview of the child and youth participation systems and budget size**

The main components of these structures are:

- DCEDIY has overall responsibility for ensuring that children and young people have a say in matters that affect them.
- Comhairle na nÓg (youth councils), established 2002, are child and youth councils (12 – 17 years) that operate in each of the 31 Local Authority areas across Ireland.
- Dáil na nÓg, established 2001, is a biennial national youth parliament for young people (12 – 17 years), with 200 delegates elected through local Comhairlí.
- Each Comhairle na nÓg (youth council) elects representatives to the Comhairle na nÓg National Executive to take action at a national level on young people's vote at Dáil na nÓg.
- Seanad na nÓg (youth senate) was held for the first time on November 10<sup>th</sup> 2022 to mark the centenary of the Seanad.
- The National Youth Assembly of Ireland, established 2022, is an overarching structure to allow young people consider issues of national importance and to feed their views into Government policy.

The Budget to operate these youth participation structures is €2.5m for this Department, additional funding is provided from Local Authorities for Comhairle na nÓg and each Government Department seeking the views of children and young people through consultations or Assemblies pays for associated costs such as venues, catering, report writer and travel expenses for children and young people.

The National Participation Office (NPO), established within DCEDIY and funded through a Participation Services Contract with Foróige, manages and coordinates the activities of the National Youth Assembly of Ireland, Comhairle na nÓg (youth councils), Dáil na nÓg and the Dáil na nÓg National Executive, Seanad na nÓg and related youth participation initiatives. The NPO is made up of a team of youth participation officers to support and guide the operation of Comhairle na nÓg, to implement the Comhairle na nÓg Five Year Development Plan and to facilitate consultations with children and young people.

### **2.1 Comhairle na nÓg (youth councils)**

Comhairle na nÓg are child and youth councils operating in each of the 31 Local Authority areas across Ireland. Comhairle na nÓg gives children and young people the opportunity to be involved in, and have a voice in the development of, local and national services and policies and any issues that affect them in their local area. It is the recognised national structure for participation by children and young people (aged 12-17 years) in decision-making. Comhairle na nÓg is funded and managed through DCEDIY. At the local level, Comhairle na nÓg is managed by Local Authorities.

Objectives of Comhairle na nÓg:

- to encourage young people to identify, prioritise and progress topics that are important to them through enabling their influence on decision-makers to take action
- to act as a consultative forum for adult decision-makers who want to include the views of young people in their work, whether it is policy development or gathering feedback on services and facilities.

## 2.2 Comhairle na nÓg National Executive

The Comhairle na nÓg National Executive is made up of 31 representatives, nominated by each of the Comhairle na nÓg local youth councils. The 31 members of the National Executive are facilitated and supported by DCEDIY and the National Participation Office to engage with appropriate Government Ministers, policy-makers, Oireachtas (Government) Committees and other decision-makers.

The National Executive has a term of office of two years, with monthly meetings to progress a topic that is important to young people. This topic is selected by a democratic vote at the National Youth Parliament known as Dáil na nÓg, who meet bi-annually.

## 2.3 Dáil na nÓg

Dáil na nÓg is the National Youth Parliament for young people and takes place every two years, as a forum where young people can raise and debate issues of concern to them and influence the development of public policy. Each Comhairle na nÓg (youth council) nominates its delegates to Dáil na nÓg, elects its representative for the Dáil na nÓg National Executive, and votes on a theme that will be the focus for discussion. After presentations by an expert panel and discussions by delegates, Dáil na nÓg votes on the topic, within the theme, for their National Executive to work on over their coming two year term.

**Dáil na nÓg 2022** took place on 26<sup>th</sup> March 2022 in the National Convention Centre Dublin and marked the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Dáil na nÓg. It was attended by approximately 200 Dáil na nÓg delegates, and focused on the theme of **Equality**, as voted during regional workshops at each Comhairle na nÓg (youth councils).

Dáil na nÓg delegates voted on a topic for the current National Executive to work on during their 2 year term, with Inclusive Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) being the chosen topic for 2022 to 2024.

**Dáil na nÓg 2019** took place in the Houses of the Oireachtas as part of the celebration of 100 years of Dáil Éireann. Dáil na nÓg 2019 focused on the theme of **Climate Action** and voted that the National Executive work specifically on the topic of **Sustainable Transport Solutions** for their 2 year term. In July 2021, they presented their final proposal to Government Ministers. The proposal was the introduction of a Youth Travel Card in Ireland to provide a 50% discount on all public transport systems for all young people up to the age of 24, whether in full time education or not. The proposal was accepted by Government and with support from the Department of Transport, National Transport Authority and the Department of the Taoiseach, the Youth Travel Card was announced by Government in October 2021 as part of Budget 2022. The Youth Travel Card was launched by Minister for Transport, Eamon Ryan, and came into effect across Ireland on 9th May 2022.

## 2.4 Seanad na nÓg

2022 marks the Centenary of the first meeting of Seanad Éireann which took place on 11 December 1922. Seanad na nÓg took place on the 10<sup>th</sup> of November 2022 as part of Seanad 100 to

commemorate this important milestone. The event, which is the first of its kind in the Seanad, is an opportunity for young people to take their seats in the Seanad and to highlight and discuss key issues and themes that they feel are of most relevance to young people.

Through a series of preparatory workshops the young delegates, from Comhairle na nÓg, an [Gaisce](#) and the [Joint Award Initiative](#), identified five themes to discuss in the Seanad. These themes included the cost of living and its impact on students; education for life to prepare young people for life after school; access to healthcare for young people; social life and amenities for young people; and financial inequality. Seanad na nÓg voted to prioritise the cost of living for a debate by Seanad Éireann with the relevant Government Minister in early 2023.

## **2.5 National Youth Assembly of Ireland**

DCEDIY established the National Youth Assembly of Ireland in 2022 to meet key commitments in the Programme for Government and collaborates closely with other Government Departments on convening Youth Assemblies on specific topics. Recommendations are intended to inform Government policy on areas such as climate, digitalisation, rural development and other issues of importance to young people. DCEDIY and the NPO collaborates with the relevant Government Department and a youth advisory group to ensure young people are effectively facilitated to express their views.

The main function of the National Youth Assembly is to provide a systematic means of capturing the voices of young people in Ireland and feeding this directly into Government policy. The messages and recommendations made by a National Youth Assembly may also feed into citizen assemblies and other broader citizen consultations.

The National Youth Assembly convenes up to four times a year, on different policy areas. This involves preparation workshops so that young people can gain sufficient information to form their views. As well as providing the delegates with information packs in advance of the Assemblies, DCEDIY hosts an information session to help prepare delegates for the Assembly. At the preparation session, delegates hear from relevant Department officials and relevant experts. The young people also prepare a set of questions for the policy Department who provide a response to the young people prior to the Assembly.

Assembly delegates take part in a range of associated activities and can represent the Assembly at events such as Stakeholder Forums, conferences etc.

## **2.6 Assemblies that have convened so far**

The first **Rural Youth Assembly** was opened by the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth in November 2021, where young people aged 12 to 17 years, from Comhairle na nÓg (youth councils), made recommendations to the Minister for Rural and Community Development. This Assembly was a precursor to the formal establishment of the National Youth Assembly of Ireland. The establishment of the National Youth Assembly of Ireland in early 2022 expanded the age range to 24 years and invited a wide range of youth organisations, as well as Comhairle na nÓg, to nominate delegates. This brought the National Rural Youth Assembly under the umbrella of the National Youth Assembly of Ireland and facilitated the inclusion of guest delegates to provide a voice for youth specifically on rural issues. The National Rural Youth Assembly convened on the 14th of July 2022. The Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth opened the Assembly and the delegates presented their recommendations to officials from

DRCD to present to the Minister for Rural and Community Development with a report on this Assembly to be published in Q4 2022.

The inaugural **National Youth Assembly on Climate** convened on 2<sup>nd</sup> March 2022, in collaboration with the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications (DECC). The Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth opened the Assembly and delegates presented their recommendations to the Minister for Environment, Climate and Communications to inform the Climate Action Plan 2022. A report detailing deliberations, discussions and recommendations from the delegates at Youth Assembly on Climate will be published in Q3 2022.

A **National Youth Assembly on Artificial Intelligence** was convened by DCEDIY in collaboration with the Department of Enterprise Trade and Employment (DETE) on October 12<sup>th</sup> 2022 at Tangent Ideas Workspace, Trinity College Dublin.

A **National Youth Assembly on a Child and Youth Policy Framework** is under discussion in DCEDIY.

## **2.7 National Consultations with Children and Young People 2021/ 2022**

In addition to providing their views on local services and policy development, Comhairle na nÓg also provides the opportunity for children and young people to have a voice on national Government policies. Government Departments and Agencies increasingly seek the views of children and young people to inform their policy and service development. An independent report writer attends each consultation and documents the views of children and young people, this report is published and a youth friendly version is created. Government is required to feedback to those consulted on where / how their views have been used.

Some examples are provided below.

### **Drugs Policy**

DCEDIY is supporting the Department of Health in consulting children and young people on national drugs policy to feed into the forthcoming citizen's assembly on drugs policy.

### **Anti-bullying in schools**

DCEDIY supported the Department of Education (DoE) to consult children and young people on its review of the action plan on bullying and of the anti-bullying procedures for primary and post-primary schools. It is intended that the anti-bullying procedures will be updated with user friendly sections for parents, students, and school staff.

### **Night Time Economy**

DCEDIY supported the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media (DTCAGSM) in consulting a 16-25 year old demographic for their recommendations to support Night-Time Economy initiatives for young people.

### **Youth Services Grant Scheme Reform**

DCEDIY consulted children and young people (12-18) about the youth services available to them, and the gaps, barriers and benefits to Universal Youth Services. The consultation will result in actionable insights incorporated into a Policy Options Paper to guide the reform of the Youth Service Grant Scheme (YSGS), which funds National/Major regional Universal Volunteer Youth Services in Ireland.

### **United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child**

DCEDIY consulted with children and young people as part of the State's preparations for Ireland's next reports to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) and the UN Human Rights Council under the Universal Periodic Review process (UPR). Consultations were undertaken with 1,215 children aged between 4 and 13 years from 21 primary schools, and 46 young people aged 13 to 18 years from Comhairle na nÓg (youth councils) to secure their views on the implementation of children's rights in Ireland. The report was published and launched in February 2022.

### **3. Pathways for the inclusion of seldom heard young people in youth participation structures**

A key action in the Comhairle na nÓg Five Year Development Plan is to continue to ensure that seldom heard young people can participate in the various youth participation structures. Seldom heard young people who are members of any youth participation structures are there as young people, rather than as representatives of specific groups or cohorts. For these reasons we do not collect data on the number of seldom heard young people who are taking part. Instead, we build in inclusivity across all of the structures in accordance with the values of Comhairle na nÓg. In 2022 a pilot project was developed by Involve, a NGO for young Travellers, to engage more young Travellers in Comhairle na nÓg. A working group will be set up in early 2023 to explore how to make participation structures more inclusive for all young people and to develop further pathways.

### **4. Children's participatory process**

How children and young people are chosen:

#### **Comhairle na nÓg:**

All Comhairlí na nÓg (youth councils) have the same goals and follow the same core programme to achieve those goals. However, each Comhairle na nÓg has developed according to the diversity of their local and regional conditions and as a result the precise recruitment processes vary within some basic core working arrangements. The young people who participate in Comhairle na nÓg are themselves evenly divided on whether candidates should be elected or selected for the Comhairle na nÓg. About half feel that they should be elected while the other half feel strongly that elections should be avoided at all costs. Essentially, there is absolutely no requirement to elect Comhairle na nÓg members.

Every year each Comhairle na nÓg (youth council) holds an AGM or a youth conference and invite young people from their region, typically through schools and youth organisations. The Comhairle consults these young people on the issues that affect them in their local area. In line with this event, each Comhairle na nÓg selects or elects their members using different methodologies according to their needs. Whatever the method of selection, a membership profile that balances age, gender, geographical location and inclusion of young people who are seldom-heard is best practice. The aim is to strive to ensure that every young person aged between 12 and 17 has access to Comhairle na nÓg regardless of their age, gender, background or where they live. Members sit for a two year term.

Once strategies have been put in place to ensure a balanced membership profile, candidates can then be (s)electd using a variety of methods, including:

- **Electoral areas:** (S)electing by electoral area ensures a good geographical spread of delegates. The electoral areas and number of seats per electoral area can be based on the corresponding number in the local authority. Delegates vote for candidates from the

electoral area in which they go to school/Youthreach. Provision for age, gender and seldom-heard young people can be made by allocating a minimum number of seats to these groups.

- **Schools and youth organisations:** AGM delegates are asked to (s)elect representatives from their own group. Where two or more candidates are (s)elected from each group, a balance in terms of age and gender can be sought.
- **AGM workshops:** Delegates are asked to (s)elect any interested candidates from the workshop they attend at the AGM. This method allows young people to (s)elect a candidate who is knowledgeable or interested in the topic being discussed and which will be worked on by the Comhairle na nÓg during the year. Using this method also requires that workshops are coordinated so that there will be representation from both genders, young people under and over 15, as well as seldom-heard young people. This requires allocating places in workshops by age and having a separate workshop of young people from seldom-heard organisations and/or allocating designated seats on the committee for these groups.
- **Expression of interest:** Some Comhairlí na nÓg do not conduct elections, but rather ask any young person who is interested to make an 'expression of interest', either verbally or in writing, to the Comhairle na nÓg Coordinator. Then, either all of the candidates are invited to join the Comhairle na nÓg or membership is randomly selected by a lottery system. Independent of what method is used, the documentation from the (s)election process is retained so that in the event of any drop-off, other young people who were interested can be approached and co-opted onto the committee.

**National Youth Assembly of Ireland:** Youth Assembly delegates range in ages from 12 to 24 years and come from all across Ireland. Fifty young people have been selected to sit on the National Youth Assembly of Ireland for a term of 18 months. The sitting delegates are nominated by Comhairle na nÓg (Local Youth Councils) and by established youth organisations. When selecting delegates from the young people nominated, the selection panel (including officials from DCEDIY and the National Participation Office) aim to select a broad representation of diverse young people from a range of youth organisations, taking into account geographical spread, urban/rural representation, age, gender and special interests. The current Assembly consists of delegates from:

Comhairle na nÓg (youth councils):

- Cork City
- Cork
- Cork County
- Dublin
- Fingal
- Kerry
- Kildare
- Mayo
- Monaghan
- Offaly
- South Dublin
- Tipperary
- Waterford
- Wexford
- Wicklow

Youth Organisations:

- Candle Community Trust - Education Programme
- Carlow Regional Youth Service
- Catholic Guides of Ireland
- Cloyne Diocesan Youth Service (CDYS)
- Crosscare
- Crosscare Ronanstown Youth Service
- Eco UNESCO
- Eurodirect Letterkenny
- Foroige
- Fridays for Future Clare
- Gaisce
- Irish Girl Guides
- Localise Youth Volunteering
- National Youth Council Ireland
- No Name Cork
- Ógras
- Ossory Youth Service

- Scouting Ireland
- Spunout
- YMCA Cork
- YMCA Ireland
- Youthwork Ireland

The sitting delegates are joined at each Assembly by a number of guest delegates who have a special interest in specific topics being addressed (such as climate issues, rural development etc.). Guest delegates are nominated by established organisations that have a particular interest in the issue being addressed by the Assembly and from organisations relevant to seldom heard children and young people. Where there are more nominations than places available, a lottery system is used to choose delegates within the criteria specified.

**Consultations:** for consultations on national policy a call out is circulated to all the Comhairle na nÓg youth councils and, if relevant, to youth organisations or other bodies. Young people respond with an expression of interest and where there are more young people interested than places available a lottery system is used to select candidates, bearing in mind that candidates are randomly selected taking account of balancing age, gender, regional spread and any other relevant criteria.

#### **Digital tools and online participation**

Since the public health response to the Covid 19 pandemic, and the increase in use of online platforms to engage with children and young people, hybrid approaches have been developed. A grant to upgrade and purchase IT equipment was dispersed to all Comhairle na nÓg youth councils in 2020.

Virtual meeting platforms are used for some meetings, youth advisory groups, consultations and other gatherings as well as in person events. Digital tools such as Padlet and Mentimeter are used so that young people can anonymously give their views and vote on their priorities.

Online consultations and events have been found to be very useful in reaching young people from remote areas and locations. For this reason a hybrid approach continues to be developed.

### **5. Facilitators and supporters, systems:**

#### **The National Participation Office**

The National Participation Office (NPO) was established in 2021 within DCEDIY to manage and coordinate the activities of Comhairle na nÓg, Dáil na nÓg, the National Executive and other related youth participation initiatives and structures. This is a key action under Goal 4 of the Comhairle na nÓg Five Year Development Plan to strengthen the structures and relationships that underpin the work of Comhairle na nÓg and related structures.

The NPO operates under the guidance and oversight of DCEDIY and has responsibility for overseeing and implementing the Comhairle na nÓg Five Year Development Plan and reporting to the Cross-departmental Oversight Committee. DCEDIY directs, oversees and supports the work of the NPO and collaborates with the Office on cross-Government engagement with Comhairle na nÓg, stakeholder engagement and relationship building.

The National Participation Office is made up of a team comprising the NPO Manager, regional Participation Officers and a participation Co-ordinator. The NPO Manager is also formally responsible



for stakeholder engagement. The NPO team oversees and supports the work of individual Comhairle Co-ordinators appointed by Local Authorities to manage each Comhairle, supports the administration of the Comhairle na nÓg Development Fund and the Comhairle na nÓg Steering Committees. The Participation team further supports the engagement of seldom heard young people, trains organisers and young people and supports networking among and between Comhairlí.

The NPO team are also responsible for conducting consultations, operating Dáil na nÓg and Comhairle na nÓg National Executive, for operating other Participation Initiatives and supports the development of policy and guidance on best-practice in children and young people's participation.

### **Local Authorities, Comhairle Coordinators and Comhairle Steering Committees**

Comhairle na nÓg is funded and managed through DCEDIY. At the local level, Comhairle na nÓg is managed by Local Authorities.

Objectives of Comhairle na nÓg:

- to encourage young people to identify, prioritise and progress topics that are important to them through enabling their influence on decision-makers to take action
- to act as a consultative forum for adult decision-makers who want to include the views of young people in their work, whether it is policy development or gathering feedback on services and facilities.

The Comhairle Coordinators are appointed by Local Authorities to support each Comhairle. They may be the Local Authority lead for Comhairle na nÓg or be retained by the Local Authority to organise and run Comhairle na nÓg. They report both to their Local Authority and to the NPO, and liaise with the relevant Local Authority to ensure that Comhairle is given due weight in decision-making processes.

Accessing funding and reporting on progress remains the responsibility of the named Comhairle lead in each Local Authority.

Each Local Authority has a Comhairle Steering Committee who liaises between the Comhairle, the Local Authority and other local bodies and who formally communicates to the NPO.

### **Funding for Comhairle na nÓg**

The Comhairle na nÓg Development fund is overseen and administered DCEDIY. DCEDIY supports and sets standards for Comhairle na nÓg and funds the NPO and its Participation Officers to support and train local Comhairle na nÓg Coordinators.

The Comhairle na nÓg Development Fund is designed to assist local authorities to support the development of Comhairle na nÓg. The fund allocates up to €25,000 funding to each local authority to run an effective Comhairle na nÓg.

In addition to the Comhairle na nÓg Development Fund, local authorities and relevant statutory and voluntary organisations in the city/county may also provide funding and resources for Comhairle na nÓg at a local level.

### **Pobal's role in funding**

[Pobal](#) has administered the Comhairle na nÓg Development Fund in collaboration with the DCEDIY since 2011. Pobal manages the transfer of payments, annual reporting and the funding request process. An online portal to support the Comhairle na nÓg administration process is also managed

by Pobal. In addition, Pobal conducts a number of annual verification visits to ensure that the administration and expenditure of funding is in accordance with the fund criteria.

As part of their funding arrangement, all recipients of the Development Fund are required to report on activities and expenditure for the annual funding period to Pobal. An annual report is then compiled and presented to the Department and to the Comhairle organisers.

### **Key findings Pobal annual report for 2021 and 2020**

**Membership:** In 2021 the total membership was 883, a reduction from 2020, when the total national membership of Comhairle na nÓg was 951. Average of 28 per Comhairle in 2021 and 31 per Comhairle in 2020. Change also in gender balance in 2021 66% were female and 34% male, in 2020 60% were female and 40% male. These changes can be related to the impact of the Covid19 pandemic.

**Topics:** Mental Health was the most popular (42%) key topic of 2021, with inclusion and equality and climate change being equally the second most popular (16% each). Climate change and mental health were identified as the two most popular key topics in 2020. A total of 67 projects/initiatives across the 12 key topics were delivered by Comhairlí

**Participation:** Comhairlí na nÓg participated in 40 consultations in 2021 and the same number was recorded in 2020.

### **Comhairle na nÓg Organisers Information Event**

The Comhairle Organisers Information Event is an annual event for this Department to engage with those who deliver the range of services for Comhairle na nÓg, including Local Authority personnel and Comhairle Co-ordinators. It provides an important opportunity to acknowledge the work carried out, to update relevant personnel on key policy developments and to present the annual report on Comhairle activities from Pobal who administer and audit the Comhairle na nÓg Development fund on behalf of the Department.

### **Comhairle na nÓg National Showcase**

The Comhairle na nÓg Showcase is a biennial event at which the young people from the 31 Comhairle na nÓg have the opportunity:

- To strengthen the national profile of Comhairle na nÓg through a showcase of the work underway in each of the 31 Comhairle na nÓg.
- To provide young people with the chance to network and share their experiences of what works in their Comhairle na nÓg.
- To provide policy makers, service providers and local and national politicians with an opportunity to visit the showcase and experience first-hand the successes and value of Comhairle na nÓg.
- Decision-makers from all over Ireland are invited to attend the Showcase and view the stands of the 31 Comhairle na nÓg.

In 2020, due to Covid-19 the event was held virtually. Over 600 young people from all around the country came together at a virtual event to celebrate their achievements and be inspired by a host of speakers and entertainers including An Taoiseach, Minister Roderic O’Gorman TD, Niall Horan, Chris Hadfield, Picture This and Denise Chaila.

## **National achievements by Comhairle na nÓg and Dáil na nÓg**

Some extremely important wins have been achieved by young people from successive Comhairle na nÓg National Executives based on recommendations from sessions of Dáil na nÓg. These include:

- The 2021 budget commitment to introduce a Youth Travel Card, launched in 2022 by the Department of Transport, proposed and developed by the National Executive as a sustainable solution to travel.
- The launch of the online resource 'Our Voices Our Schools' in December 2019 which enabled schools to listen and involve young people in decision making about matters that affect them in school.
- The launch of the Social Media Campaign #TeachMeAsMe on October 2019 which implemented an awareness campaign in schools to promote individuality.
- The launch of the 'So how was School today?' report which was presented before the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Education and Skills (2017).
- The hosting of a national launch of 'Let's Go Mental' in June 2015, followed by 'Let's Go Mental' events in all 31 local authority areas which promoted positive mental health among teenagers through music, sport, the arts and other fun activities.(2015)
- The National Executive held very strongly attended presentations for TDs and Senators entitled 'Your Comhairle Needs You', which highlighted the ways in which members of the Oireachtas should work with and support their local Comhairle na nÓg (2013 and 2015).

## **6. Comhairle na nÓg Five Year Development Plan**

The Comhairle na nÓg Five Year Development Plan was published in July 2021 and aims to allow Comhairle na nÓg to reach more children and young people and enable them to influence more decision makers. This helps the Irish Government to deliver on Article 12 of the UNCRC.

The Comhairle na nÓg Five Year Development Plan arose from a recommendation (G20.2) in the *National Strategy on Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-making (2015-2020)*:

The role and capacity of Comhairle na nÓg will be enhanced through the development and implementation of a 5-year Comhairle na nÓg Development Plan, aligned to Local Government structures and policies, and including children under the age of 12 and children and young people who are seldom heard. (Recommendation G20.2).

The Plan prioritises the establishment of a National Participation Office to manage Comhairle activities; a collective voice for Comhairle na nÓg; continuous improvement; adequate funding; diverse and inclusive membership; guidance and support for members; a Communications and Branding campaign to ensure recognition and awareness of Comhairle na nÓg among young people, decision-makers and all stakeholder groups.

### **Vision and Mission**

**Vision:** Comhairle Na nÓg is recognised locally and nationally as the go to structure empowering young people of all backgrounds to speak up, be heard and influence decisions on matters that affect their lives

**Mission:** Our mission is to be the permanent rights-based structure that represents the voice of young people in Ireland and provides them with a platform to meaningfully engage with decision-makers and influence matters that affect them

### **Goals**

1. Extending the reach and influence of Comhairle na nÓg by engaging more broadly with young people and decision-makers
2. Improving the operational delivery
3. Enhancing and improving the culture and communications of Comhairle na nÓg in order to be more widely recognised
4. Strengthening and organising the internal and external structures across all the Comhairle na nÓg relationships