



# Children and Young People's Experiences of Health Information and Quality Authority Inspections

An Irish Association of Young People in Care Consultation with  
Young People in Residential Services on Behalf of the Health  
Information and Quality Authority

*Safer Better Care*

## About the Health Information and Quality Authority

**The Health Information and Quality Authority (the Authority) is the independent Authority which has been established under the Health Act 2007 to drive continuous improvement in Ireland's health and social care services.**

The Authority was established as part of the Government's overall Health Service Reform Programme. The Authority's mandate extends across the quality and safety of the public, private (within its social care function) and voluntary sectors. Reporting directly to the Minister for Health and Children, the Authority has statutory responsibility for:

- Setting Standards for Health and Social Services – Developing person-centred standards, based on evidence and best international practice, for health and social care services in Ireland (except mental health services).
- Social Services Inspectorate – Registration and inspection of residential homes for children, older people and people with disabilities. Inspecting children detention schools and foster care services. Monitoring day- and pre-school facilities<sup>1</sup>.
- Monitoring Healthcare Quality – Monitoring standards of quality and safety in our health services and implementing continuous quality assurance programmes to promote improvements in quality and safety standards in health. As deemed necessary, undertaking investigations into suspected serious service failure in healthcare.
- Health Technology Assessment – Ensuring the best outcome for the service user by evaluating the clinical and economic effectiveness of drugs, equipment, diagnostic techniques and health promotion activities.
- Health Information – Advising on the collection and sharing of information across the services, evaluating information and publishing information about the delivery and performance of Ireland's health and social care services.

## About the Irish Association of Young People in Care

**The Irish Association of Young People in Care (IAYPIC) is an independent association that works throughout the Republic of Ireland, with and for children and young people who are currently living in care or who have had an experience of living in care.**

This includes those in residential care, foster care, hostel, high support and special care. IAYPIC also works with young people preparing to leave care and in aftercare. See [www.iaypic.org/](http://www.iaypic.org/) for further information.

1. Not all parts of the relevant legislation, the Health Act 2007, have been commenced. Those parts that apply to children's services are likely to be commenced in 2010.

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## Foreword

The Social Service Inspectorate was set up in 1999 to inspect social services in Ireland. It was administered by the Department of Health and Children (DoHC) until May 2007, when it was established on a statutory basis as the Office of the Chief Inspector of Social Services within the Health Information and Quality Authority (the Authority).

The Authority conducts inspections of statutory residential childcare services and foster care services run by the Health Service Executive (HSE) under statutory powers contained in Section 69 of the Child Care Act, 1991. It also inspects detention schools under the auspices of the Irish Youth Justice Service<sup>2</sup>. Inspectors are authorised to enter any centre and examine the state and management of the premises and the treatment of children there. They are also permitted to examine such records and interview such members of staff as they deem appropriate.

Inspections are conducted within clearly defined national standards and regulations covering key areas such as the purpose and function of the centre, management and staffing, monitoring, children's rights, planning for children, care of children, safeguarding and child protection, education, health and accommodation. Inspections can be either announced or unannounced.

When an inspection is announced, the Authority writes to the HSE giving it four weeks' notice and requesting information about the centre to be forwarded to the Authority. The children also receive a letter outlining the inspection process. There are one to three days of fieldwork generally conducted by two inspectors. Census data on staff and children is collected. Inspectors look at policies and procedures, centre records and files. They conduct interviews with children, managers, staff, and social workers, parents, teachers, doctors and any professional associated with the wellbeing of the children. Inspectors also observe childcare practice in the centre. Within this framework, inspectors examine how well the children are looked after.

A draft report with findings and recommendations is sent to the HSE for factual accuracy and then the final report is published by the Authority on its website, [www.hiqa.ie](http://www.hiqa.ie). The children also get an individualised child-friendly report. Inspectors conduct a follow-up inspection generally within three months to ensure that recommendations are being complied with.

2. The Irish Youth Justice Service is an executive office of the Department of Justice and Law Reform.

## The Context

The Authority is dedicated to giving children a voice in the inspection process. At present this is facilitated, among other things, by writing to children prior to inspection, encouraging children at the centre to talk to inspectors and also giving the young people the opportunity to share their views by completing questionnaires focused on young people. A report is then written for each child that addresses the views they shared during the inspection.

The Authority requested the Irish Association of Young People in Care (IAYPIC) to conduct the consultation process summarised in this report. This is in line with the Authority's ongoing commitment to consulting with children and giving them a voice in relation to the inspection process and to making the process more effective, child friendly, meaningful and affirming.

## Acknowledgements

This report was prepared by Brenda Kneafsey, Fiona Murray, and Fiona Daly of the IAYPIC. The IAYPIC and the Authority would like to thank the young people who took part in the consultation for their openness and courtesy during the focus group process. The cooperation, assistance, and professional courtesy extended to the facilitators by the residential care service providers is also acknowledged.

## Executive summary

The Irish Association of Young People in Care (IAYPIC) conducted 10 consultation focus groups with young people in various forms of care to determine their views on, and their experiences of, the inspection process conducted by the Social Services Inspectorate of the Health Information and Quality Authority (the Authority).

The young people consulted were in residential care, leaving care and aftercare, special care and children detention schools. The consultation was in response to a request made by the Authority, facilitated by IAYPIC, which took place throughout December 2009.

Forty-one young people from 10 centres were invited to take part in the consultation. These included one special care unit, two children's detention schools, six community-based children's residential centres and one leaving and aftercare centre. Of these 41 young people, 22 took part in the consultation. An equal number of boys and girls took part, the majority of whom were aged between 13 and 17 years of age.

The main research method used in the consultation was a focus group and this involved asking young people both closed questions, using multiple choice answers within pre-defined categories, and open questions, which gave the young people the opportunity to explore their own experiences in more detail. The information collected consisted of both quantitative (involving key statistical information) and qualitative data (exploring the views of the young people). The questions were divided under the headings: preparation, process, feedback and "your ideas".

The majority of young people (91%) reported having experienced announced inspections which they had been informed of formally through a letter from inspectors at the Authority and informally by their peers. While the *National Standards for Children's Residential Centres* was a source of information for young people, only one young person linked it to inspections. Over two-thirds of young people, 68%, said they understood the reason for inspections while 32% said they did not understand why inspections took place. The most common reason young people gave for inspections taking place was to inspect living conditions within the centre, followed by child welfare concerns and staff practices.

Most young people did not mind having inspectors in their centre, describing them as nice and friendly and there was no apparent issue amongst young people about the gender of inspectors. The majority of young people (86%) reported speaking with inspectors individually, while 50% reported to have completed a questionnaire for the inspection.

There was some confusion reported in children detention schools differentiating between the Authority's inspectors, Department of Education inspectors and other professionals who may have met with young people in the centres.

The majority of young people (82%) did not know how to contact inspectors following an inspection and very few young people reported receiving feedback from the inspectors.

The key issues identified by the young people ranged from notification about the inspection, inspectors spending more time with the young people prior to the inspection and during the inspection process, to inspectors dressing casually when conducting inspections.

Some young people were unhappy with the inspectors' recording methods and suggested introducing a practice of having their comments and feedback read back to them.

Other key issues related to the feedback report issued by the Authority to the young people following an inspection. The young people said that this report should be received by them within a reasonable timeframe and should directly respond to their concerns.

Overall, young people viewed inspectors positively and some reported positive changes as a result of the inspection process.

## 1. Introduction

The Irish Association of Young People in Care (IAYPIC) carried out 10 consultation focus group events as requested by the Health Information and Quality Authority. The consultation process was facilitated by the Aftercare Support Network Coordinator and a Children's Rights and Participation Officer in IAYPIC, and took place throughout December 2009.

The purpose of the consultation was to ascertain young people's views and experiences of the inspection process of the residential services, special care and children detention schools, conducted by the Social Service Inspectorate within the Authority, to inform future practice by the Authority.

The Authority provided IAYPIC with the names of the managers and contact details for 10 residential centres.

The Authority gave a commitment that on receipt of the final report it would write to the young people involved in the consultation to inform them about how the findings would be used.

### Profile of young people involved

Of the 41 young people invited to participate in the consultation, 22 took part. Table 1 gives a gender and age breakdown of participants. There were 11 males and 11 females between the ages of 10 and 19 years of age. The majority of young people (18) were between 13 and 17 years old.

**Table 1. Profile of young people involved**

AGE (YEARS)	NO. OF BOYS	NO. OF GIRLS
10	1	0
11	0	0
12	0	0
13	1	2
14	2	1
15	4	1
16	2	1
17	1	4
18	0	1
19	0	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>11</b>

## Profile of centres

Table 2 shows that of the 10 centres participating in the consultation, five were based in Dublin City or County and five were located outside Dublin.

**Table 2. Geographical location of centres**

COUNTIES/CITIES	NUMBER OF CENTRES
Dublin City	3
Dublin County	2
Limerick	2
Cork	1
Westmeath	1
Longford	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>10</b>

The centres involved comprised one special care unit, two children detention schools, six community-based children's residential centres and one leaving and aftercare centre. This breakdown of centres involved in the research represent a total of 33.3% of all special care units within Ireland, 50% of children detention schools, 11.5% of community-based children's residential centres and 100% of leaving and aftercare centres<sup>3</sup>.

## Pre-consultation phase

Initial contact with each centre manager was made by the Authority. IAYPIC then contacted the managers and asked their permission to meet with them and their staff to explain the purpose of the consultation. Arrangements were also made to meet with the young people in their care who had an experience of the inspection process.

All managers and young people received a letter from IAYPIC, which gave information about the aim of the consultation and what it would involve. An IAYPIC poster was also sent to every centre to notify the staff and young people of the date and time that the consultation event would take place. On request, and where necessary, consent forms for young people were provided to residential centres.

3. There is currently only one leaving and aftercare service in Ireland inspected by the Authority.

## 2. Methodology

The facilitators from the Irish Association of Young People in Care took into account the following factors when designing the consultation style that would be most appropriate for the young people:

- age of the young people
- gender mix
- young people's literacy levels
- recognition that the young people would be working as a group
- the fact that they may not have been involved in a consultation before
- the type of care placement – residential care, special care or children detention schools.

### Research methodology

The main research method used in the consultation was a focus group. Focus groups produce data based on interaction and communication between the participants. This method facilitates obtaining different viewpoints at the same time. During the focus groups, the number of young people who were involved in each group differed across the centres and depended on who was in the centre at the assigned time.

A consistent approach was taken in collecting data from young people. Two IAYPIC facilitators were present at each of the 10 consultation focus group events, with one leading the group by asking the questions and the other observing and making written notes.

Data was recorded on a flip chart which was in full view of the young people taking part. The facilitators chose this way of documenting young people's views as it was visible and transparent to young people, while also giving young people the opportunity to check and clarify anything that had been written down on the chart.

The consultation involved asking young people both closed questions (using multiple choice answers within pre-defined categories) and open questions, which gave the young people opportunity to explore their own experiences in more detail. Therefore, the information collected consisted of both quantitative and qualitative data.

The questions were incorporated into a "Talking Mat" (See Appendix 1) designed in the style of a board game with questions divided under the headings: preparation, process, feedback, and "your ideas" (See Appendix 2 on page 29). In addition to the use of the Talking Mat, the facilitators had five prompts to show young people. These were the:

- Authority's letter to the young people announcing an inspection
- Authority's leaflet for young people about inspections
- Authority's inspection – young people's feedback reports (2 examples)
- Authority's questionnaire to young people as part of the inspection
- *National Standards for Children's Residential Centres.*

These were shown to young people at every consultation focus group event and were used to establish young people's familiarity with the documentation and whether they remembered receiving a copy.

### **Data analysis**

Given the quantitative and qualitative nature of the data collected, data analysis involved two strategies.

Firstly, frequency tables based on the quantitative data (questions with pre-defined categories) which provided a count of the number of times a response was selected.

Secondly, doing a content analysis of qualitative data (open questions) which involved grouping similar responses together and assigning thematic categories to identify the key issues that were coming up for young people.

### 3. Findings

This section presents the findings from the focus groups, divided into four main sections: preparation, process, feedback, and the ideas board. In relation to the quantitative results, some of the statistics refer to the total number of centres (10) while others are based on the number of young people (22). This will be specified throughout.

#### Preparation

##### How the young people heard about the inspection

Table 3 (below) shows that the most common way that the young people heard about an inspection taking place was through the Authority's letter. This was selected by young people in 6 out of 10 centres.

**Table 3. Source of information about inspections\***

INFORMATION SOURCE	NO. OF CENTRES	% OF CENTRES
Letter from the Authority	6	60
Other young people	4	40
National Standards for Children's Residential Centres	3	38 <sup>4</sup>
Keyworker	3	30
Authority's leaflet	1	10
Parent	1	10
Poster	0	0
House meeting	0	0

\* Table 3 adds up to more than 100% as more than one information source could be selected

However, when young people were shown a copy of the letter from the Authority, many of them had a limited recollection of it. The second highest information source was "other young people", which was chosen by young people in 4 out of 10 centres. Young people also indicated that they had heard about the inspection from their keyworker – chosen by young people in 3 out of 10 centres. None of the young people participating in the consultation in the above centres recalled hearing about the inspection from a poster or a house meeting.

The *National Standards for Children's Residential Centres* was selected by young people in 3 centres out of 8, which represents a general information source about inspections. When young people were shown a copy of the *National Standards for Children's Residential Centres*, they all recognised it and had seen it in their residential units. In one unit, a young person recalled that the inspectors had it out on the table when they visited. Some young people said they had received it on their entry to a residential centre. When asked if they had read it, many young people said

4. This result is based on eight centres as the two children detention schools that were part of the consultation are outside the remit of the National Standards.

they had not as they thought it was boring, not very interesting or not very colourful. Of those who said they had read the *National Standards for Children's Residential Centres*, they said they read it either because it was their first time in care or because they were bored. Young people from just one centre were aware that the *National Standards for Children's Residential Centres* related to the inspectors visiting their centre.

Young people in one centre recalled seeing the Authority's information leaflet. This leaflet was shown to young people at each consultation. The facilitators noted that the information on the leaflet does not explicitly link inspections carried out by the Authority to the *National Standards for Children's Residential Centres*.

### **Announced or unannounced inspections**

The young people were asked if they had experienced an announced or unannounced inspection and young people's responses are in relation to their recollection of experiencing an inspection. Only one young person had experienced both an announced and unannounced inspection during his/her time in care. Facilitators did not have information on the number, type of inspections or timeframe in which inspections were held in each of the 10 centres.

The majority of young people said that the inspection was announced, 91% (20), while only 9% (two) said it was unannounced and they were not aware the inspection was taking place.

One young person said he/she found out about the inspection at the last minute when the inspectors arrived. This young person does not live in the residential unit full-time but happened to be scheduled to stay in the unit on one of the inspection days. One young person said he/she did not feel prepared for it.

### **Young people's feelings about the unannounced visit**

This question only related to two young people from the 10 centres. Comments included:

*"I just came home and they were there and asked if I'd talk to them. Staff told me they were inspectors.....I just thought that's the way it was."*

Another young person said that he understood that inspectors could come unannounced just like health inspectors come unannounced to restaurants.

### **Young people's understanding of the reasons for inspections**

It is worthy of notice that two-thirds of the young people participating in the consultation focus groups (68% or 15 young people) believed they understood why the inspectors were visiting their unit. One young person said that the inspectors wanted to get his experiences. Another young person commented that the purpose of inspection was "to check how things are". Although the majority of young people said they understood the reason for inspection, it is significant that almost one-third (32% or seven young people) said that they did not understand why the inspectors were in the centre.

When young people were asked to give reasons for the inspection, 60% thought the inspectors were coming to inspect their accommodation, the facilities available to them and the condition/cleanliness of their house/unit. A few young people spoke about the inspectors looking around the house and checking the young person's sleeping accommodation, how the house was run and whether it was up to standard. One young person said the staff were "cleaning everything".

In addition to looking at physical aspects of the centre and the facilities, young people also stated that another reason for the inspection was to consider child welfare and safety concerns. Several aspects of children's wellbeing were identified by young people, which ranged from meeting basic physical needs such as having proper food to ensuring that young people are being treated fairly and respectfully, as well as considering their general happiness. In addition, one young person mentioned that inspections were done to obtain young people's experiences which could then improve inspections in the future. Comments from young people included:

*"That you are safe."*

*"Not being treated unfairly."*

*"That we are happy."*

*"To get the young person's point of view of how things could be improved."*

Some other young people thought that the inspections were about the staff and to see if the staff were doing their "jobs properly" in terms of how they treated young people and how the house was run. One young person expressed the view that the inspections were solely about the staff rather than the young people themselves.

Young people were most likely to understand that inspections were carried out to examine the quality and condition of the centre.

Young people also linked the inspections to a concern for their own safety and welfare, which is an important connection for them to make in terms of their understanding of the purpose of inspections. Finally, some young people said that the inspections were being done to look at staff practice.

Two young people said that they did not know what the inspectors were inspecting. Another young person made the point that he felt he needed to be told about the inspection in advance in order for him to prepare for the visit. Therefore, where young people had little understanding of the reasons why the inspection was taking place, this was likely to be due to lack of information.

A further question considered the issue of who young people would ask if they had queries about an inspection. Of the 10 centres, young people in eight of them said that they knew who they would ask if they had a question about an inspection. However, in two of the centres young people felt they did not know who to ask about the Authority's inspections. Further exploration found that young people were most likely to ask staff (9 out of 10 centres), the centre manager (5 out of 10 centres) or their keyworker (4 out of 10 centres). Therefore, if young people felt the need to ask someone about an inspection, they focused on individuals connected to the centre rather than identifying anyone else outside the centre or the Health Information and Quality Authority inspectors.

## Process

### Young people's feelings about having inspectors in the residential centre

Young people were asked to indicate how they felt about having inspectors in the residential centre by selecting one or more cards that had different feelings written on them. Table 4 shows the number of centres in which one or more young person/people chose each feeling.

**Table 4. Feelings about inspections in the centre\***

FEELINGS DESCRIBED ON CARDS	NO. OF CENTRES OUT OF 10 CENTRES	PERCENTAGE OF CENTRES
Grand	7	70%
Okay	6	60%
Didn't care	6	60%
Delighted	4	40%
Happy	3	30%
Anxious	3	30%
Worried	2	20%
Relieved	2	20%
Annoyed	1	10%

\* Table 4 adds up to more than 100% as more than one option could be selected

Overall, young people expressed very little concern about having the inspectors in their residential centre. Table 4 shows that young people in a relatively high number of centres said that they felt "grand" (7 out of 10 centres) or "okay" (6 out of 10 centres). The fact that the young people could meet the inspectors privately and that the staff would not be informed of the content of the meeting was an important issue for a number of the young people. Young people in two centres expressed a sense of relief as they got an opportunity to tell inspectors how things were from their own perspective. Comments included:

*"In the past, places like those around the country, young people got battered, it's good to see that someone makes sure bad things aren't happening."*

*"Doesn't bother us, used to seeing people coming in."*

A few young people said that they felt worried, which could indicate some level of anxiety among the young people prior to and at the early stages of the inspection. Young people may also be picking up on some level of anxiety and preoccupation by the staff and management in relation to the inspection. One young person did say that he/she did not know the inspectors were coming so he/she did not know what to think.

In addition to the closed responses given in Table 4, young people were offered blank cards to write answers on if they felt none of the feelings adequately reflected their views. Eight young people chose to write on a blank card, with the following remarks:

- "don't know" (three young people)
- "don't mind" (four young people)
- "felt nice" (one young person).

Therefore, when the question was opened up to other possible responses, these results did not add anything different to that recorded in Table 4.

Taking account of all of the data in relation to young people's feelings about inspections, the facilitators felt that many of the young people were happy to take part and some young people viewed the inspectors' visits in a positive light. Some fears and anxieties were expressed in a few centres, which would need to be addressed. Adequate information and preparation before the inspection could help to allay young people's fears and anxieties, where this was an issue.

### Communication between young people and inspectors during the inspection

Table 5 shows that almost all the participants spoke with the inspectors individually (86% or 19 young people). This could be on a formal basis, where conversations were recorded, or else informally while out in the garden, showing the inspectors their room or in the kitchen.

**Table 5. Methods of communication between young people and inspectors\***

OPTION	NO. OF YOUNG PEOPLE	PERCENTAGE OF YOUNG PEOPLE
Spoke with the inspector individually	19	86%
Completed the questionnaire	11	50%
Chose not to meet the inspector	2	9%
Met with the inspector as a group	1	5%

\* Table 5 adds up to more than 100% as young people could select more than one option

One young person spoke with the inspectors individually but had not planned to. He/she felt obliged to talk to them as he/she was in the kitchen when the inspectors arrived. The young person said staff had "shuffled" out of the kitchen and left him/her with the

inspector. Some young people recounted talking to the inspectors as having "talked to them like normal".

Half of young people (11) said they completed the questionnaire for the inspection. However, there was some confusion about this as some young people had no recollection of ever seeing the questionnaire. Some could not remember if they had filled it in while others were very clear that they had filled it in themselves or had done so with the help of their keyworker (one young person).

The issue of literacy came up for one centre where a young person made a general comment about the potential difficulties that someone may have in filling in the questionnaire if they had a learning difficulty. This comment was met with agreement by the other two young people from this centre who were present at the consultation focus groups.

Of those who had filled in the questionnaire, two young people recalled their questionnaires not being taken. One young person said the inspector "flicked" through his/her questionnaire and handed it back to him/ her. The facilitator asked the young person if he/she had spent much time filling out the questionnaire and he/she said "45 minutes". The other young person said he/she had filled out his/her questionnaire but was never asked for it. This shows that the inspector's response when given the questionnaire was important to the young person, and could make a difference by valuing the young person's opinions as well as acknowledging the effort made to fill it in.

Table 5 shows that two young people chose not to meet with the inspectors. The reasons given for this were that one of the young people said he/she did not speak to the inspector as he/she did not understand why they were visiting the unit in question. The other young person said, "I wasn't in the humour."

### **Young people's feelings about speaking to the inspectors**

Most young people spoke fairly positively of their meetings with the inspectors describing the inspectors as "very nice". Some described themselves as being nervous when first meeting the inspectors but then relaxing having met them. The inspectors were described as "wearing suits", "asking millions of questions" and "a little intimidating". One young person said he/she did not have a sense of the type of people the inspectors were, and it would be nicer to get to know the inspectors "before they start firing questions at you".

Some of the comments made were as follows:

*"Happy to talk to them."*

*"I didn't talk to them but I didn't mind them being in the house."*

*"They were alright, they were nice and one was a vegetarian."*

*"There really were a lot of questions – like 'did you get on with your keyworker?'"*

During the discussion, a few young people spoke about experiencing feelings of upset and anxiety during the inspection. One young person described how he/she was a bit upset having met the inspectors as he/she had spoken about his/her past during the interview. When asked by the facilitator how he/she felt about this experience, he/she replied, "first it would put me off – but life goes on." Another young person described how he/she had asked to meet with the female inspector but was told by the staff that he/she had to meet both inspectors. He/she went on to say the following:

*"I was a bit afraid, I asked staff to come up, they said go up on your own."*

Another issue that came up for young people was the methods used to record information. One young person described the Inspector's visit as "scary" and went on to say:

*"Scribbling everything you say down and you can't see what they are writing."*

A number of other young people also made comments about the recording methods used during inspections. When asked to compare the flip chart method of recording used in the focus groups to those used during inspections, young people said they were more comfortable with how information was recorded in the focus groups. When this was explored further by the facilitator, two young people said that the Talking Mat allowed them to see the questions they would be asked and the flip chart allowed them to see what was being recorded.

This information indicates that attention may need to be given to the methods used by inspectors to record information from young people's perspective in order to ensure that young people are relaxed and comfortable during inspections. Some young people said they would have liked the information they had given to inspectors, and which was recorded during the inspection, read back to them. This could be something that inspectors check with young people at the end of each inspection.

In some instances, young people expressed feelings of confusion during inspections. One young person was not sure which inspectors he had met as he recalled meeting a male and female inspector as well as meeting two other inspectors. This may be due to the fact that this centre is inspected by the Irish Youth Justice Service and the Department of Education. Another young person was a little confused as to whether he/she was speaking to inspectors or the HSE's monitoring officer as he/she recalled being given a number to contact a female inspector. When the facilitator spoke to the manager of the unit she believed the young person was recalling a visit by the monitoring officer. This data highlights the importance of clarifying the roles of inspectors, as well as ensuring that young people know the identity of the inspectors before the visit.

## Young people's views about the inspectors

Overall, the young people described the inspectors as being nice and friendly. Other descriptions included "easy to talk to", "lovely", "jolly" and "alright". One young person said that the inspectors spent most of their time in the office and spent half an hour having a cup of tea. Another young person said the inspectors looked "pure suss" and went on to say that staff were trying to impress the inspectors "the rules were enforced and things were being done".

Many of the comments by young people were about the inspector's presentation, especially in terms of the type of clothes they wore. Some of the young people described the inspectors as wearing suits and that the inspectors looked professional, like business people. One young person said it showed respect and that it was part of the inspector's job to wear a suit. When asked by the facilitator how they felt about the inspectors wearing suits, some of the young people were not concerned with what the inspectors wore. However, a few young people said that it made them feel uneasy, with one young person saying that they felt inferior to the inspectors, and another described feeling slightly "intimidated". Some of the comments included:

*"They were nice, friendly."*

*"Dressed very smart, wearing suits like in an office...  
made me feel like nothing."*

*"They [the inspectors] probably have to wear suits to be professional...  
It can be a bit intimidating, like you're in trouble, they should wear like  
jeans and a top."*

Inspectors should be aware of the potential impact of their attire on young people, particularly in terms of reinforcing notions of inequality of power. Although many young people understood why they wore suits and were quite happy about this, for others it caused some difficulty as they felt that the inspector was superior to them. Quite a few young people suggested that inspectors should dress more casually, with one young person suggesting that they should wear a tracksuit.

## Gender of the inspectors

As part of the consultation, the facilitators were asked to find out if the gender of inspectors was an issue for young people. Overall, young people did not have a strong preference about gender. Some of the comments made were:

*"Well, I don't really mind as long as they were nice."*

*"It didn't bother me; I'm used to talking to men and women."*

There was a general consensus that one male and one female inspector was a good balance, which was the typical gender mix reported by young people based on past inspections. In the case of one centre which cared for females only, two young people expressed a preference for female inspectors. A third young person (male) stated a preference for speaking to a male inspector. However, these were the only exceptions to the general consensus of having one female and one male inspector.

One consideration that did emerge from some of the comments was that young people should be given a choice as to the inspector whom they spoke to. Therefore, if there was one male and one female inspector present, the young person could decide which inspector they spoke to depending on how comfortable they felt. It was acknowledged by a few young people that the gender of inspectors could be significant for other young people, although they themselves did not have an issue with it.

### Contacting inspectors after inspections

The majority of young people did not know how to contact the inspectors after the inspection had taken place (82% or 18 young people), while the remaining 18% (four young people) said they would know how to contact them. When asked to suggest ways that young people might use to contact the inspectors, two young people felt they could look up the Inspector's telephone number using a directory inquiry service or could ask staff how they could contact them. One young person who recalled being given a contact number may have received this from the HSE monitoring officer.

There was some confusion over whether young people could contact inspectors. Two young people said they were told they could not contact the inspectors after the unit was inspected. They did not think they would be allowed to have the Authority's contact details on their contact cards. Some others were very clear that they were not given contact information by the inspectors.

### Feedback to young people after inspections

Young people were asked if they had received any feedback following the inspection. The majority of young people said that they did not hear anything about the inspection after it had taken place. Only 18% (four) of the young people reported that they had received any form of feedback. Table 6 shows the method of feedback to young people.

**Table 6. Methods of feedback to young people**

METHOD OF FEEDBACK	NO. OF YOUNG PEOPLE	% OF YOUNG PEOPLE
Received a letter	2	9%
Received a report	1	5%
Manager spoke to young person	2	9%
Looked up the report on the Authority's website	0	0%

Table 6 shows that young people were most likely to receive feedback in the form of a letter or from the centre manager. After being shown a copy of a report by the Authority, one young person felt that he may have received a report as it looked pretty familiar to him (this same young person had also received a letter). It is interesting to note that none of the participants looked at the Authority's website.

After being shown sample materials, eight of the participants could not recall receiving a letter or a report and could not identify them. One young person said he/she got a letter back, which was unlike the ones shown by the facilitator, but this may have been from the HSE monitoring officer.

When asked what happened as a result of the inspection, some of the comments made by young people were as follows:

*"After the inspectors came I noticed the rooms got painted."*

*"Nothing happened."*

### **Young people's knowledge and use of the Authority's website**

None of the young people said they had looked up the Authority's website ([www.hiqa.ie](http://www.hiqa.ie)). However, many of young people who took part in the consultation did not have access to the Internet in their unit. If they do have Internet access, it tends to be limited to certain sites. One young person commented:

*"No, never heard of it before... don't have Internet access in the unit."*

Similarly, when young people were asked if they knew that the Authority's website had information for young people, all of them replied "no". It was clear that young people were not aware of the Authority's website and therefore not aware of information being available for young people on the site. Young people's responses included the following:

*"Hadr't a breeze."*

*"What information is on it?"*

### **Young people's views on whether inspections are a good idea**

When asked if inspections were a good idea, the majority of young people responded positively. A few young people said that inspections were important and saw them as a way of making improvements in the centre if staff were unable to make the changes. Comments in this regard included:

*"If something is not right and staff aren't doing anything, then you can say it to the inspectors.... If a manager and staff can't do it at least the inspectors can."*

*“It’s kinda good that people are coming out to see how you are.... We are being fed and we are being looked after... the mattresses are hard but they’ve been that way for years.”*

However, two young people felt that inspections were pointless. One of these young people said that when the inspectors left the centre, they did not hear from them again. Another young person said that inspections did not result in any change. Other young people said that it was important for change to happen as a result of inspections, where this was necessary. There were also examples reported of positive changes for young people as a result of inspections, such as a change of doctor.

Another young person highlighted the significance of getting feedback from the inspectors, which would show that their comments were valued, which adds further support to the earlier findings about feedback to young people following inspections. Comments included:

*“It would be nice to see your time wasn’t wasted.... If the inspectors would get back to us about stuff.”*

The last section in the findings presents the results on young people’s recommendations for inspections.

### **Young people’s views on criteria for inspections**

Young people made comments about the criteria that inspections should be focused on. The responses were coded into categories and are presented below, in order of rank importance (the first being the most popular response). Young people believed inspections should focus on:

- the physical condition of the house and facilities available – for example, the standard of all the rooms, whether kitchen equipment works, and the availability of sports equipment
- how staff treat young people – in particular that everyone is treated fairly and the same way as others (fair treatment was mentioned by three young people). One young person felt that staff behaviour towards young people changed during the inspection
- relationships between staff and young people – ways in which staff and young people interact
- rules in the centre – that they are fair, stay the same and that young people understand them. Maintaining consistent rules in different units was also mentioned by one young person
- disciplinary procedures – are consistently applied in relation to how staff deal with difficult behaviour. This was a particular issue for young people in children detention schools and special care units, where two young people mentioned the use of restraints

- the importance of listening – to young people and acting on the information they give to inspectors. For example, one young person said, “they should do something with what we tell them.”
- young people’s daily experiences in the centre.
- information and reports in the centre’s office, for example staff logs.
- young people’s privacy in the centre.

## Ideas Board

### Children and young people’s advice to inspectors

The final part of the consultation involved asking young people to give their ideas as to how inspections could be improved in future. In addition, they were asked to identify what they thought inspectors should look at whilst carrying them out. These two questions were asked in the Ideas Board (see Section 4 of Appendix 2 on page 29).

### Young people’s recommendations on improving inspections

The majority of the responses given by young people could be divided into the three stages of the consultation that were the basis for most of the questions: preparation, process, and feedback. This is not surprising as these particular issues had been discussed by young people during the earlier part of the consultation, and therefore they were likely to be at the forefront of their minds while taking part in the Ideas Board. As a result, this piece on young people’s recommendations for future inspections is divided into the same three categories.

#### **Preparation**

Suggestions made by young people focused on three main aspects of preparation:

- Ensure that all young people (including children who recently moved into a centre) know when the inspection is taking place with an adequate number of days’ notice. One young person also mentioned the need for parents to know about the inspection, although it is clearly stated in the *Social Service Inspectorate Information for Young People* leaflet that inspectors talk to the parents of young people.
- Information about inspections and the reasons for them should be clear to young people and any letters or leaflets should be received by young people before the inspection takes place.

For example, one young person said:

*“Let young people know why they are here and the reasons behind it.”*

- Inspectors should take more time to talk to young people about inspections before the inspection takes place. This was also a suggestion made by several young people in relation to the process of carrying out the inspections.

## Process

Suggestions made by young people related to the following aspects of the inspection process:

- Spend more time with young people (identified by six young people) so that inspectors can get to know young people and see them doing everyday normal activities in the centre. It was felt that this would help to ensure that inspectors were well informed about the young people who were taking part in the inspections.
- Follow-up inspections should be done by the same inspectors where possible and during a fixed timeframe after the initial inspection. One young person said that if different inspectors do the follow up, then young people should be made aware of this beforehand.
- Carry out unannounced visits (four young people).

For example, one young person said:

*“They should be in every once in a while [unexpected] to know the way things are run in the house.”*

- Young people also had suggestions about the presentation of inspectors. In particular, several young people (n=4) felt that inspectors should wear more casual clothes so that the inspections would be less formal. One young person felt that this was important when inspections were being carried out in centres which cared for younger children.
- Inspectors should spend more time with staff in the house (two young people) and talk more to the staff (another two young people) to get a good insight of how the house is run. Similarly, two young people suggested that inspectors should stay overnight in the house as part of the inspection.

## Feedback

- Inspectors should give feedback to young people after a reasonable amount of time.
- Any feedback given by inspectors should directly respond to concerns raised by young people and should be clear about what will happen as a result of an inspection.

One young person said that they experienced positive change as a result of the inspection.

*“Things changed when the inspectors came. I got a change of doctor after speaking to the inspector. I was asking staff to change my doctor for ages.”*

- Young people should be able to contact inspectors after the inspection has been carried out (two young people).

## 4. Conclusion

This conclusion identifies four key themes which are based on the findings from the consultation with young people. It finishes with a set of recommendations which have been compiled using the views of young people in conjunction with some of the observations made by the two facilitators throughout the process.

### Key themes

1. The nature of information received by young people was insufficient. While the majority of young people said the inspection was announced, a few reported that they did not know about the inspection. In addition, hearing that an inspection was taking place from peers was the second most likely way that young people found out about an inspection, the first being receiving a letter or leaflet from the Authority.

Information provided to young people needs to be clear and easy to understand, as well as being easily recognisable as being issued from the Authority. In many cases, young people said they did not recognise the Authority's materials shown to them during the consultation. There was some confusion expressed by the young people as to whether they had completed the the Authority's questionnaire.

2. The length of time that inspectors spent with young people was deemed as not long enough by young people, both prior to and during inspections.

Spending time with the young person prior to the inspection will help to build trust and help the young person to be as honest as possible. More time spent with young people during the course of inspections will help to ensure that inspectors are fully informed about young people's life in the centre. Several of the young people reported that they were unclear about the inspector's role compared to other professionals that they were in contact with.

3. Young people's understanding of the reasons for inspections could be enhanced.

Two-thirds of young people said they knew why inspections took place and were able to give some feedback as to their purpose. However, they rarely made any connection between inspections and the National Standards for Children's Residential Centres. In addition, young people were more likely to identify aspects of the physical conditions of the centre than issues associated with child welfare concerns. Appropriate information about the purpose of inspections will help to allay any fears or anxieties that young people may have around inspections taking place. In addition, young people in special care units or children detention schools felt that disciplinary procedures should be one of the criteria that inspectors looked at.

4. The lack of feedback reported by young people.

This relates to the small numbers of young people who said that they received any formal feedback from the Authority after inspections. Also, some young people felt that they would like some feedback during the inspection in terms of having the information they gave to inspectors read back to them. Overall, young people were not sure if they could contact inspectors after they had left the centre.

## 5. Recommendations from the Irish Association of Young People in Care

1. Information in Health Information and Quality Authority reports, letters and leaflets must be clear and young-person friendly with due consideration made to literacy levels. For example, it might be a worthwhile exercise to ask a group of young people to go through the materials and give their comments before they go to print.
2. The information in the Authority's leaflet should include a group photo of the inspectors so young people can identify the inspectors when they visit their unit.
3. The Authority's leaflet should state explicitly that inspectors visit centres to inspect them against the standards for those centres i.e. *National Standards for Children's Residential Centres*, *Standards & Criteria for Children Detention Schools*, and *National Standards for Special Care Units*.
4. The Authority should consider having an information campaign to inform young people about the purpose and process of inspections. This could be done formally by Authority inspectors or informally through peers using young people who have experienced inspections to inform other young people about what to expect.
5. Authority materials used to communicate with young people regarding the inspection process i.e. *National Standards for Children's Residential Centres*, leaflets, letters, reports and questionnaires need to use a single identifiable logo or image in order to ensure young people link this directly with the inspector's visits.
6. IAYPIC would suggest running a poster campaign among the residential centres which would allow young people to design the poster as well as raising young people's awareness of the Authority.
7. Any posters sent to units to announce a forthcoming inspection should use the same logo or image.
8. The *National Standards for Children's Residential Centres* document needs to reflect the connection / relationship between the Standards inspected and the Authority's inspections.
9. The presentation and layout of the *National Standards for Children's Residential Centres* needs to be interesting, colourful and young-person friendly.
10. HSE/Authority should ensure that young people are given copies of the *National Standards for Children's Residential Centres* prior to the inspection.
11. Inspectors should specify which standards are being reviewed in the forthcoming inspection in the letter sent to the young people before inspections take place.

12. The message that parents and social workers are consulted as part of the inspection process, although clearly stated in the Authority's leaflet, needs to be reinforced. In addition, young people should be told that files and documentation about them, for example care plans, placement plans, files and daily logs are also reviewed by the inspectors as required under the *National Standards for Children's Residential Centres*.
13. It is the practice of the Authority to inform young people by letter of announced inspections. The Authority should also ensure staff and management also inform young people of pending announced inspections. Consideration should be given to young people who receive respite support from services and may be resident during the inspection.
14. The Authority should consider whether inspectors could spend more time in the company of the young people prior to the inspection to build trusting and open relationships. This would also help to allay any of the young people's fears or concerns about the inspection process. For example, one possible way to achieve this would be for inspectors to carry out a preliminary visit to centres.
15. All inspections are carried out in a consistent way, for example all questionnaires collected from young people, providing young people with inspectors' contact details etc..
16. Practice guidelines should be closely adhered to by all inspectors involved in the inspection process.
17. Inspectors should consider how they record information during their meetings with young people. Inspectors should consider offering young people an opportunity to have their responses read back to them. This also offers the young person a chance to clarify what they have said.
18. The Authority should ensure that its contact details are on the contact sheet of all young people who are in the care of the state. Each centre should advise the young people of the contact details if they wish to contact the Authority.
19. Inspectors should provide each young person with a laminated contact card before they complete an inspection.
20. The Authority provides young people with a feedback report after the inspection. Follow up by the Authority may be required to ensure that young people have received their copy of the report. The report should be clear about recommendations identified and whether changes are required or not within the service and clearly stating the reasons for the decisions made.
21. Young people need to be made aware of the Authority's website and the information it contains relevant to them. In order to facilitate young people's use of the website, the issue of Internet access needs to be addressed by centre staff, with a possible role for the Authority.

# Appendices

## Appendix 1: *Talking Mat*

The consultation focus groups involved asking young people both closed questions and open questions, which were incorporated into a "Talking Mat" (illustrated here) designed in the style of a board game.



## Appendix 2: Questions

Questions were divided under the headings: preparation, process, feedback, and “your ideas” as follows:

### Section 1: Preparation

#### Q1. How did you hear about the inspection?

- a. Was it an announced or unannounced visit?
- b. How did you feel about the unannounced visit?

#### Q2. Did you understand why inspectors were coming to your residential centre?

- a. Yes  No
- b. What do you think inspectors were coming to inspect?

#### Q3. If you had any questions about the inspection who would you ask?

### Section 2: Process

#### Q1. How did you feel about having inspectors in your residential centre?

#### Q2. How did you communicate with the inspectors?

- a. Why did you choose not to meet with the Inspector?

#### Q3. How did you feel speaking one to one with the inspector?

#### Q4. a. What were the inspectors like?

- b. Would you know how to contact the inspectors after they left your residential centre?

### Section 3: Feedback

#### Q1. How did you get feedback about the inspection?

#### Q2. Have you ever looked at the HIQA website?

- a. Yes  No
- b. Did you know that there is information on the HIQA website for young people?  
Yes  No

#### Q3. Do you think inspections are a good idea?

- Yes  No

## **Section 4: Ideas Board**

The Ideas Board consisted of two sheets of A2 coloured card which included two questions.

**Q1. How could inspections be improved?**

**Q2. What do you think inspectors should look at during the inspections?**

Each young person was provided with a number of coloured Post-its and a marker to write down their suggestions in relation to each question. The Post-its were then placed on the appropriate sheet. The facilitators explained to the young people that this section of the consultation was to compile young people's views on how the inspection process could be improved and to give this feedback to the inspectors as young people's recommendations. The facilitators had to offer some prompts at first as the young people found it difficult to come up with suggestions. The prompts used came from the issues raised by young people during the use of the "Talking Mat". Overall, young people engaged well with the Ideas Board and they all contributed to the information that was gathered.



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