Evaluation Report: Comhairle na nÓg Development Fund 2009-2010

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OFFICE OF THE MINISTER FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH AFFAIRS
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Minister’s Foreword

My Office, the Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (OMCYA), takes the lead role in ensuring the development of structures that enable participation in decision-making by children and young people, as outlined in the National Children’s Strategy (2000). Such structures include Comhairle na nÓg (local youth councils) and Dáil na nÓg (national youth parliament).

The 34 City and County Development Boards (CDBs) are responsible for implementing the National Children’s Strategy at local level and for establishing Comhairle na nÓg to give children and young people an opportunity to influence local policy, planning and services. The effective development of Comhairle na nÓg is named as a Government priority in Towards 2016.

The Comhairle na nÓg Development Fund was established by my Office in 2007 to support the CDBs in running effective Comhairle na nÓg all around the country. Applications under the scheme are obliged to meet criteria that ensure effective engagement by members of the Comhairle na nÓg with key adult decision-makers and decision-making bodies. As part of this scheme, an independent evaluator was appointed to measure success in improving the operation of Comhairle na nÓg and obtaining value for money.

This report of the independent evaluator highlights that in its third year (2009-2010), the Development Fund has resulted in significant improvements in the operation of many Comhairlí na nÓg. The impact of the funding over the last three years shows that an increased number of Comhairlí have succeeded in identifying issues of concern to young people and spearheading positive changes on those issues.

Some CDBs have established regular sessions of Comhairle na nÓg that link with the adult County Council and interact with policy-makers to ensure that the views of young people are included in shaping policies and services. The development of local partnerships with external agencies, such as youth services or other organisations engaged with seldom-heard young people, has been pivotal in ensuring broad access to Comhairle na nÓg. It is evident from the current report that many Comhairlí have established steering committees comprised of decision-makers in key local agencies, such as the County/City Council, youth organisations, the HSE, the VEC, sports partnerships, non-governmental organisations and young people.

As a result of the success of the third year of this initiative, the Comhairle na nÓg Development Fund will continue in 2011. This funding scheme is part of an ongoing strategy to enhance the effectiveness of Comhairle na nÓg and to develop good practice in participation in decision-making by children and young people.

Barry Andrews, TD
Minister for Children and Youth Affairs
Acknowledgements

The successful development of Comhairle na nÓg involves the efforts of many dedicated people at national and local level.

The Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (OMCYA) and the author would like to acknowledge the efforts of each Comhairle for their significant work and application throughout the year and for providing the information that forms the basis of this evaluation report. Particular thanks should be extended to the young people who make up the vibrant Comhairli nationwide.

City and County Development Boards and their staff, youth services and their staff, and a host of other key stakeholders work assiduously and in partnership to ensure Comhairle na nÓg is the important structure in youth participation in Ireland that it is today.

Special acknowledgement is afforded to the young people and staff of the four Comhairli na nÓg who contributed to the in-depth evaluations conducted by the author, namely:

- Cork City Comhairle;
- Donegal Comhairle;
- Dublin City Comhairle;
- Offaly Comhairle.

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Cnag ar an Doras
About the author

Olivia McEvoy, Cnag ar an Doras, is a freelance consultant and lifecoach in the youth and community sectors and works with a variety of government and non-governmental organisations.

She has been the independent evaluator of the Comhairle na nÓg Development Fund since 2008 and of the OMCYA's Children and Young People's Forum since 2007. She was also the independent evaluator of the OMCYA's Inclusion Project in 2008 and 2009. In addition, she has written a number of other reports for the OMCYA, including:

- *Teenage Mental Health: What helps and what hurts?* (2009);
- *Report on teenagers’ views on solutions to alcohol misuse* (2008);
- youth-friendly versions of *Teenspace: The National Recreation Policy for Young People* (2007);
- *Report on the consultations with teenagers on the issues to be considered by the Minister for Children when examining the age of consent for sexual activity* (2006).

She has also conducted a number of projects for Belong To, Growing Up in Ireland, OPEN, YouthBank and Youth Work Ireland.

Further details are available on [www.cnagarandoras.ie](http://www.cnagarandoras.ie)
Executive Summary

This report provides an independent evaluation of 32 Comhairlí na nÓg that are in receipt of funding from the Comhairle na nÓg Development Fund provided by the Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (OMCYA). This fund is now in its third year.

The report is arranged under the following headings:
- support structure for Comhairle na nÓg (Chapter 1);
- working arrangements for Comhairle na nÓg (Chapter 2);
- work programme of Comhairle na nÓg (Chapter 3);
- raising the profile of Comhairle na nÓg (Chapter 4);
- work of OMCYA’s Children and Young People’s Participation Support Team (Chapter 5);
- impact of funding (Chapter 6);
- conclusions, challenges, key recommendations and next steps (Chapter 7).

The evaluation finds that there are a number of supportive local policies and strategies in place that help contextualise and prioritise Comhairle na nÓg as a key area of work. Moreover, some 94% of Comhairlí na nÓg now have steering committees in place, which are considered very useful in providing links to local decision-makers, accessing expertise on issues that young people identify, raising awareness and support for Comhairle na nÓg, and accessing seldom-heard young people. Just over three-quarters of the steering committees had Comhairle na nÓg member representation, with the recommendation that the remaining 21% should follow suit at the earliest opportunity.

The evaluation also finds that the main recommendation of the 2008-09 Evaluation Report in relation to the working arrangements of Comhairle na nÓg has been largely implemented, with evidence of a concerted effort to address the imbalance in age profile of Comhairle na nÓg membership. Although the data are not directly comparable, an average of 41% of the Comhairle na nÓg membership is now aged 12-15 years, while an average of 59% is aged 16-18 years. However, there are a number of Comhairlí that have much work to do to align their membership to this national average, although they will benefit greatly by engaging in some of the numerous strategies used by their Comhairle na nÓg colleagues to attract and maintain the interest of young people in the lower age bracket.

There were also positive reports on the steady participation of seldom-heard young people and the fact that some 84% of Comhairlí are now operating a 2-year term of office for committee membership. Perhaps most significantly, 72% of all Comhairlí are meeting at least once a month – and some more often.

Chapter 3 on the Comhairle’s work programme profiles the attendance at the 28 AGMs held during 2009-2010 throughout the country (4 Comhairlí did not stage an AGM during the year). The average number of attendees at each AGM was 81, most of whom came
from schools, with a good age and gender balance as well as significant representation of seldom-heard young people. A great array of issues were discussed under the headings, among others, of health, facilities and local government, education, having a voice, safety issues, attitudes and young people, young people and the workplace. The report outlines the multiplicity of ways issues were chosen for the AGMs before they are prioritised by either the Comhairle na nÓg committee or less often at the AGM itself for pursuit by the Comhairle committee throughout the Comhairle year. (There was only one example where adults were involved in choosing the issues.) The prioritisation process is followed by young people devising a variety of strategies, developing action plans and undergoing training in a bid to achieve their targeted outcomes, many of which are achieved, others that may take longer and some that may never come to fruition. By choosing their own issues and how they will pursue them, the members of the Comhairlí are exerting influence and impact on an agenda set by themselves.

Linking with decision-makers, both on the issues identified by young people as important as well as other issues of importance, is obviously a key way to exert further influence and impact on local decisions. The evidence from this evaluation suggests that young people are represented on a variety of decision-making agencies and bodies in just under half of Comhairle na nÓg areas. Moreover, Comhairlí are increasingly seen as the consultative voice for young people. Many Comhairlí also make regular presentations to the City/County Development Board or its agencies in their area and/or to their local City/County Council. They also support the work of other youth participation structures and are engaged in a variety of other activities. This work has led 61% of Comhairlí to rank their impact as ‘very influential’ in changes made on the issues they were working on, with a further 32% assessing their impact as ‘somewhat influential’.

The report also illustrates how Comhairlí na nÓg have engaged in a number of strategies to raise the profile of the Comhairle work programme, not least their engagement with the local media of radio and press, as well as web-based media. The impact of the OMCYA’s Children and Young People’s Participation Support Team, established in 2009, is also analysed, outlining the numerous supports and training that Comhairlí availed of during the year, with particular emphasis on the importance of the national Information and Networking Days. The Comhairlí also suggested a number of additional supports for the future, although 66% of them ranked the current support as ‘very useful’ and a further 28% reckoned the support was ‘useful’.

The assessment of the impact of funding finds that the Comhairle na nÓg Development Fund has resulted in a more systematic and structurally robust programme, which is gradually becoming more embedded in the Local Authority system and making it less dependent on individuals ‘championing’ issues. These improved structures, combined with additional training, support from the Children and Young People’s Participation Support Team and the sustained funding, have made it possible for Comhairlí na nÓg to develop the Comhairle work programme, which is key to the overall success of the national organisation. While the funding has certainly resulted in an increased number of Comhairlí facilitating young people to identify and pursue issues of importance to them (many of which have achieved their targeted outcomes), there are many other Comhairlí that need to increase their efforts to operate in this fashion. Concentrating one’s efforts on this element of the
Executive Summary

The work programme is, not surprisingly, correlated to the chances of young people having an influence and impact on an agenda that has been set by them, as well as on other local issues of importance. The report does find that the intangibility of some of the outcomes makes it difficult to assess the extent of the impact and influence of Comhairle na nÓg and recommends further improvement in the area. However, the increased effort on the Comhairle work programme, following the criteria for funding, the progress made on the numerous issues outlined, the fact that so many young people are now sitting on local government agencies that make important local decisions, and the fact that Comhairle na nÓg is increasingly seen as the consultative forum for young people by decision-makers – all these outcomes mean that the Comhairle na nÓg Development Fund has undoubtedly made a difference and resulted in an increased impact and influence by young people on local decision-making.

The key challenges and next steps for Comhairle na nÓg include:

- maintaining the level of funding and resources of the Comhairle work programme;
- ensuring the Comhairle work programme remains a key area of work in the Local Authorities;
- ensuring the Comhairle work programme is developed in all areas to allow young people to conduct whatever work is necessary to achieve their targeted outcomes on the issues that matter to them;
- maintaining links with the decision-makers that can help them deliver those outcomes.

The report concludes by emphasizing the importance of ensuring that all young people in all areas are afforded the same opportunities to identify issues of importance and influence positive change in their local areas, so that Comhairle na nÓg’s overall impact and influence can finally be taken to the next level.
1. Support structure for Comhairle na nÓg

Overview

A Comhairle na nÓg now exists in all 34 City and County Development Boards (CDBs) around the country, with the expressed aim of helping to deliver Goal 1 of the National Children's Strategy (2000), which states that ‘Children will have a voice in matters which affect them and their views will be given due weight in accordance with their age and maturity’. The Comhairlí na nÓg are effectively local youth councils designed to give children and young people the ‘right to have his or her voice heard’ in relation to the development of local services and policies, thereby fulfilling Ireland’s commitment to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The Comhairle na nÓg Development Fund is a grant scheme administered by the Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (OMCYA). It aims to develop, support and enhance the core objectives and key activities of the Comhairle na nÓg programme, the delivery of which is the responsibility of the Local Authority in each city and county.

Now in its third year, the Comhairle na nÓg Development Fund scheme has been independently evaluated for the previous two years, with past reports emphasizing two priority areas: (1) the creation of formal and sustained links with local decision-makers and (2) ensuring that membership of Comhairle na nÓg represents all age groups between 12 and 18 years. Based on the information received from 32 Comhairlí na nÓg, this evaluation report, covering the Comhairle year 2009-2010, considers progress made in these two priority areas, as well as examining the support structures and working arrangements of the Comhairle work programme. Finally, the report looks at the challenges facing Comhairle na nÓg and makes recommendations for the programme in the future.

Supportive local policies and strategies for Comhairle na nÓg

It is important for key stakeholders, particularly those trying to actually deliver Comhairle na nÓg, that there is a support structure in place to aid that process. Supportive local policies and strategies provide a context and help prioritise Comhairle na nÓg as a key area of work. Moreover, steering committees have become a key cornerstone of the support structure for Comhairle in recent years.
There is a diverse range of supportive policies in place in the majority of Local Authority areas. Some 69% have identified Comhairle na nÓg as a ‘priority action’ (see Figure 1) in at least one Local Authority Plan, such as the following:

- An Stráitéis Implementation Plan;
- Budget Plan;
- Community and Enterprise Operational/Work Plan;
- Corporate Plan;
- Social, Economic and Cultural Strategy;
- Social Inclusion Plan;
- Strategic Policy Committee for Community and Enterprise;
- Strategic Policy Committee for Community and Enterprise, Tourism and Emergency Services;
- Youth Strategy.

Figure 1: Comhairle identified as priority action in Local Authority plans (%)

Overall, 78% of City/County Development Boards (CDBs) have identified Comhairle na nÓg as a ‘priority action’ in their CDB Strategy (see Figure 2), stating the need to establish or maintain a ‘youth forum to enable all children and young people … to have an input into relevant policies and services’ (quote from County Development Plan, Kildare, 2012). Fewer CDBs have actually developed a specific strategic plan for Comhairle na nÓg (25%), although 38% intend to develop such a plan or have one in draft format (see Figure 3).

Figure 2: Comhairle identified as priority action in CDB Strategy (%)
The 2008-09 evaluation report of the Comhairle na nÓg Development Fund outlined the benefits of having a steering committee in each Comhairle and recommended that ‘where not already in existence, a steering committee should be established to assist and advise the Comhairle na nÓg Coordinator/CDB’. One year later, an overwhelming 94% of Comhairlí now have a steering committee in place. Members were asked to rate the usefulness of their steering committees in 5 specific areas (see Figure 4 for results):

- raising awareness of and support for Comhairle na nÓg;
- access to seldom-heard young people through the organisations represented;
- extra facilitation and support for running Comhairle na nÓg and AGMs;
- links to local decision-makers;
- expertise on issues identified by the young people.
The ratings in Figure 4 indicate that, by and large, Comhairle na nÓg organisers find the steering committees either ‘very useful’ or ‘useful’ in all 5 areas. The notable exception is that 17% did not find steering committees useful for providing extra facilitation and support for running Comhairle na nÓg and AGMs, although one must remember that this is not the main function of a steering committee. More relevant is the fact that 10% did not find steering committees useful for making links to local decision-makers, which is one of the primary functions of a steering committee; however, 47% did find them ‘useful’ for this purpose and another 43% found them ‘very useful’. Overall, steering committees were deemed especially useful for accessing expertise on the issues that young people identify, for raising awareness and support for Comhairle na nÓg and for accessing seldom-heard young people.

The majority of steering committees in place (67%) meet once a quarter; a further 15% meet once a month, while 9% meet more than once a month and another 9% meet less than once a quarter (see Figure 5). Where the steering committees are in place, just over three-quarters (79%) have reserved places for young people, while many of those that do not have young people on the committee (21%) plan to review that process in the near future (see Figure 6).

Figure 5: Frequency of meetings of steering committees (%)

![Figure 5: Frequency of meetings of steering committees (%)](image)

- More than once a month: 9%
- Once a quarter: 15%
- Once a month: 9%
- Less than once a quarter: 67%

Figure 6: Young people on steering committees (%)

![Figure 6: Young people on steering committees (%)](image)

- Yes: 79%
- No: 21%
In addition to the places for young people, an array of other key stakeholders are represented on the various steering committees, including:

- An Garda Síochána
- Alcohol Forums
- Belong To
- Childcare Committees
- Community and Voluntary Forums
- County Enterprise Board
- Development Partnerships
- Disability groups
- Garda Youth Diversion Projects
- Health Promotion groups
- Le Chéile
- Pavee Point
- Road Safety groups
- Rehab
- Schools and Teachers
- Scouting Ireland
- Sports Partnerships
- Health Service Executive (HSE)
- VEC
- YMCA
- Youthreach
- Youth cafés
- Youth Development Centres
- Youth services (e.g. Foróige and Youth Work Ireland)

Perhaps because many of the steering committees are relatively new, only 41% have ‘terms of reference’ in place and a further 34% are currently developing such terms of reference (see Figure 7). Similarly, just under half (48%) have conducted training with their steering committee, most of which is in the form of induction training or a briefing on the Comhairle na nÓg AGM, although some have also conducted facilitation training (see Figure 8). Some (11%) openly stated that they did not feel that any training was necessary since the agencies represented were professionals who knew the sector well.

**Figure 7: Steering committees with ‘terms of reference’ in place (%)**

```
Yes 41%
Draft 34%
No 25%
```

**Figure 8: Steering committee members who have undertaken training (%)**

```
Yes 48%
No need 11%
No 41%
```
KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations specific to the support structure of and support mechanisms for Comhairle na nÓg might therefore include:

- Identified as the key mechanism to ensure young people have a voice on issues that affect their lives in the National Children’s Strategy (2000).
- Comhairle na nÓg should be named in local policies and strategies to help prioritise Comhairle na nÓg as a key area of work.
- Where a steering committee is still not in place, it should be implemented as soon as possible.
- Where young people are not represented on the steering committee, they should be facilitated and supported to become committee members as soon as possible.
- Steering committee members should avail of any relevant training offered by the OMCYA’s Children and Young People’s Participation Support Team.
2. Working arrangements for Comhairle na nÓg

Membership profile

Numbers of young people involved

The membership profile of Comhairle na nÓg in its entirety is given in Table 1. As can be seen, each Comhairle has varying numbers of young people involved, with as many as 124 involved in Kildare (who run regional Comhairli na nÓg) and as few as 10 in South Dublin (who are going through something of a transition). On average, there are 33 young people in a Comhairle na nÓg. However, as happens in programmes involving young people, there is a considerable drop-off from the original membership to those who attend regularly (see Figure 9).
### Table 1: Membership profile of all Comhairlí na nÓg

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Comhairle na nÓg</th>
<th>Members</th>
<th>Regular attendees</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>12-15 years</th>
<th>16-18 years</th>
<th>Seldom-heard</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Regular</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>attendes</td>
<td>attendes</td>
<td>attendes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carlow</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clare</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>89%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cork City</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cork County</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donegal</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>89%</td>
<td>0%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dublin City</td>
<td>50</td>
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<td>45%</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dun Laoghaire/Rathdown</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fingal</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>74%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Galway City</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Galway County</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kerry</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>74%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kildare</td>
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<td>124</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>61%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kilkenny</td>
<td>23</td>
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<td>48%</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laois</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>83%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
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<td>Leitrim</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>60%</td>
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<td>Limerick City</td>
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<td>19</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>43%</td>
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<td>56%</td>
<td>24%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Limerick County</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Longford</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Louth</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mayo</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Meath</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monaghan</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Tipperary</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>not available</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>73%</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offaly</td>
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<td>60</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roscommon</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sligo</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Dublin</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Tipperary</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Waterford City</td>
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<td>13</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Waterford County</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>89%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Westmeath</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wexford</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wicklow</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Average</strong></td>
<td><strong>33</strong></td>
<td><strong>26</strong></td>
<td><strong>45%</strong></td>
<td><strong>55%</strong></td>
<td><strong>41%</strong></td>
<td><strong>59%</strong></td>
<td><strong>21%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 9: Comhairle membership – Range and average (no. of members)

Gender of young people involved
Although there are some instances where the gender divide is somewhat skewed – most notably in Clare (where there are only 11% of males) and South Dublin (where there are only 20% of females), the average participation of males (45%) and females (55%) is relatively even.

Age profile of young people involved
The evaluation reports over the past 2 years (2007-09) have noted and advised against the trend of ‘restricting the Comhairle na nÓg to Transition Year students or those over the age of 15’ and recommended that ‘Comhairle na nÓg members should represent all ages between 12 and 18’. Guidelines on how to recruit the younger cohort of young people were also provided.

At the time of last year’s report, leaving one Comhairle na nÓg aside, some 76% of Comhairle members were aged 15 or over, while 53% were aged 16 or over, with a mere 6% of 12-year-olds and 7% of 13-year-olds comprising the Comhairle na nÓg membership. Although the data are not directly comparable, it is now the case (in 2009-2010) that an average of 41% of Comhairle members are aged 12-15, while an average of 59% are aged 16-18 (see Table 1). However, there are 10 instances where less than 30% of the Comhairle membership is aged 12-15 and some instances where that percentage is as low as 10% and 11%. While there is clearly further work to be done to ensure that younger young people have the same opportunities to be involved in the programme, those Comhairli might note some of the excellent strategies that their colleagues have employed during 2009-2010 to ensure the participation of young people aged 12-15 (see ‘Strategies’, p. 13). In addition, Comhairli na nÓg have found it is important to use youth-friendly methodologies at both the AGM and throughout the process to ensure that those in the younger age bracket remain interested.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STRATEGIES to ensure the participation of 12-15 year-olds</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Schools</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Asking schools to provide equal numbers of representatives from the junior and senior cycles.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Working directly with teachers on the issue.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Ensuring all correspondence clearly states that Comhairle is directed at young people aged 12-18 and requesting that a policy of selecting Transition Year or older students only be avoided.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Comhairle Coordinator visits to primary schools and junior cycle classes to explain Comhairle na nÓg and encourage participation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Comhairle members making presentations to the junior cycles in their own schools and their former primary schools.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Rotating age requirements for individual schools for attendance at the AGM.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>General</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Contacting and including youth organisations that have programmes for younger young people in all correspondence and on each Comhairle's steering committee.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Providing age-appropriate packs and information.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Following up any written correspondence with telephone calls emphasizing the age range.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Facebook and Bebo pages targeting younger people.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Posters and newsletters promoting Comhairle and specifically targeting younger members.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Contacting former members of Comhairle na bPaistí (where it existed) to see if they are interested in joining.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Having age-specific working groups at the AGM from which the Comhairle members are elected, ensuring a certain percentage of each age group are elected to the Comhairle committee.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Where vacant seats arise on the committee, filling them with young people aged 12-15, if necessary.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It should also be noted that a number of Comhairlí na nÓg do not have (or traditionally have not had) any issues attracting the younger cohort and do not need to employ any particular strategies to ensure age balance.

**Participation of seldom-heard young people**

The participation of seldom-heard young people\(^1\) has traditionally been a source of concern for many of the stakeholders involved in delivering Comhairle na nÓg. There have been issues about accessing seldom-heard young people and also in maintaining their interest.

The practice of ‘assessing’ the meaningful inclusion and participation of seldom-heard young people is also not without its challenges. Indeed, a number of Comhairlí noted that they deliberately avoided profiling the Comhairle members or were not able to ascertain the particular background of each young person. Because of these ‘measurement difficulties’, the reliability of the data on seldom-heard young people (see below) is somewhat questionable.

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\(^1\) ‘Seldom-heard’ young people is a term used to describe young people who tend not to have many opportunities to have their voices heard, including young people with disabilities, from an economically disadvantaged or culturally different background, young people in care, lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered (LGBT) young people, as well as those from more rural backgrounds and ethnic minorities.
It is interesting to note from Table 1 that the average percentage of seldom-heard young people in Comhairle na nÓg is exactly as it was last year (2008-09) – at 21% – although the average somewhat masks another picture where the participation of seldom-heard young people is as high as 75% in Offaly and as low as 0% in 4 locations, with a further 3 Comhairlí under 10%. However, this steady and significant percentage (21%) suggests that seldom-heard young people are indeed being included and participating in Comhairle na nÓg and that the concerted efforts to include them are reaping significant rewards.

While there is no precise model on how best to ensure the participation of seldom-heard young people, previous evaluation reports have listed what has worked well for many Comhairlí na nÓg. Details of the strategies and actions undertaken by Comhairlí in 2009-2010 to ensure the participation of seldom-heard young people are listed in the ‘Strategies’ box below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STRATEGIES to ensure the participation of seldom-heard young people</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Links with organisations</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Ensuring organisations representing the seldom-heard are on the Comhairle steering committee.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Establishing an expert advisory sub-committee to develop a strategy for social inclusion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Linking with the School Completion programme.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Ensuring schools do not only send young people from student councils.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Inviting young people from Special Youth Projects and Garda Youth Diversion Projects.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Creating links with Youthreach and youth training workshops.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Working with youth services that can provide links to seldom-heard young people.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Engaging with representatives from RAPID programmes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Comhairle Coordinator visits to seldom-heard groups.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Seeking special additional funding to work on strategies to include seldom-heard young people.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Including ‘seldom-heard’ as an agenda item for the Comhairle committee so young people know the importance of inclusion.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Capacity-building</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Capacity-building with young people to ensure they are ready for the experience.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Conducting capacity-building workshops before the AGM.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Developing leadership and youth participation programmes for young people.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>AGM-related strategies</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Designating specific places for seldom-heard young people at the AGM and on the Comhairle committee.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Staging an attractive youth-friendly AGM that uses creative methodologies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Providing a template note to schools about why students would be absent on the day of the AGM.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Sending invitations to attend the AGM to organisations representing seldom-heard young people.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Promotion</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Sending promotional materials (e.g. newsletters) to organisations representing seldom-heard young people.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Making a DVD to promote Comhairle with these groups.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Holding specific events in disadvantaged communities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Holding an event targeting a particular group of young people.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
While many of these strategies are clearly working for Comhairlí na nÓg, the inclusion of organisations representing seldom-heard young people on the Comhairle na nÓg steering committees is probably especially important, as noted earlier in Figure 4 where it was seen that 96% of respondents deemed the steering committee either ‘very useful’ or ‘useful’ in accessing seldom-heard young people. In addition, Comhairlí na nÓg report that targeting and linking with a wide range of organisations representing seldom-heard young people and then capacity-building (or enabling the organisation to capacity-build directly with the participants) have also proven key over the last number of years.

Meeting arrangements

The typical meeting arrangements of Comhairle na nÓg are illustrated below: Figure 10 shows how often Comhairle na nÓg actually meet once they are (s)elected and Figure 11 shows where those meetings take place.

It has been one of the single greatest achievements of the Comhairle na nÓg Development Fund that all Comhairlí na nÓg now meet on a regular basis rather than holding a one-off event. Almost half (47%) of Comhairlí na nÓg are now meeting once a month (see Figure 10). A further 25% meet as often as once a fortnight, while another 13% meet every 2 months. Some Comhairlí na nÓg (15%) have ‘other’ arrangements, most usually those Comhairlí that meet at local level on an ongoing basis and come together on a county-wide basis less often (e.g. in Donegal, groups meet in their electoral areas at least once a month and then meet county-wide 3 times a year).

**Figure 10: Frequency of Comhairle meetings (%)**

- 47% meet once a month
- 25% meet once every two months
- 13% meet once a fortnight
- 15% meet ‘other’

Some 43% of these Comhairle meetings take place in Local Authority buildings, while another 33% are hosted by the youth services organising the meetings (see Figure 11). A further 22% are held in a local youth café or other youth-orientated centre. Only one Comhairle holds its meetings in a hotel. Finally, 6 Comhairle indicated that they use a combination of the Local Authority buildings, youth services and youth cafés, depending on the nature of the meeting and availability of premises.
Once elected, the vast majority of Comhairlì na nÓg (88%) provide training for their members (see Figure 12).

While the common trend is to provide training on committee skills and team-building, many Comhairlì na nÓg offer a variety of other training opportunities. The list of training carried out during the 2009-2010 period included:

**Skills-based training**
- Committee skills
- Communication skills
- Decision-making
- Facilitation
- Leadership
- Media
- Public relations (PR)
- Presentation skills
- Web skills
Issues-based training
- Citizenship
- Contentious issues
- Democracy
- Sexual health
- Voter education
- Youth participation

Personal growth and awareness
- Cultural diversity
- Disability awareness
- Drugs awareness
- Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered (LGBT) awareness
- Personal safety
- Self-esteem
- Team-building
Many Comhairlí na nÓg deliver a variety of training at certain points in the year to aid the different aspects of the Comhairle programme. For example, the training provided in Leitrim Comhairle illustrates this variety:

**CASE STUDY**

**LEITRIM Comhairle na nÓg:** Members received training on all of the following throughout the year 2009-2010:
- team-building and how to use your strengths;
- how a committee works;
- various roles on the committee;
- local politics;
- PR skills;
- using the media to highlight issues.

**Term of office**

The 2008-2009 evaluation report noted the benefits of having a 2-year term of office for Comhairle na nÓg members and recommended that ‘*the Comhairle na nÓg committee should sit for a 2-year term of office, where possible*’. At that point last year, 52% of Comhairlí had a 2-year term of office in place. In 2009-2010, some 84% of Comhairlí na nÓg now operate a 2-year term system – an increase of 32%. Only 10% have a 1 year-term, while 6% do not set any term of office and operate a system of ‘natural turnover’ (although one Comhairle is currently reviewing this more ad hoc system).

**Figure 13: Term of office for Comhairle members (%)**

It is important that some flexibility remains in relation to the term of office because it needs to reflect the views of the local Comhairle members and the capacity of the organisers. However, in addition to the benefits outlined in the 2008-2009 evaluation report (such as the increased likelihood of linking with decision-makers and of young people having more time to acquire the necessary skills and confidence to make the most of their experience and achieve results), it is also apparent that there is increased stability in many of the Comhairlí, which now have more time to follow a programme where members can consider what issues they want to pursue and pursue those issues until they achieve a desired outcome.
KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations specific to the working arrangements for Comhairle na nÓg might therefore include:

- Where an age imbalance persists, strategies (see p. 13) to ensure the participation of young people from all age groups should be employed.
- Where age balance at the AGM is achieved but not on the Comhairle na nÓg committee, elections for the Comhairle committee should be structured to cater for age balance. This can be achieved by having age-specific working groups from where the young people are elected to the committee.
- Capacity-building with young people, especially seldom-heard young people (see p. 14), is essential to ensure that they are able to participate meaningfully and benefit from the experience.
- A sensitive mechanism to record the profile of Comhairle members without labelling young people (e.g. as ‘seldom-heard’) needs to be devised.

Summary

The main recommendations on working arrangements from last year have been largely implemented during 2009-2010, with a seemingly more balanced age profile and the vast majority of Comhairlí now operating a 2-year term of office, as well as a steady participation of seldom-heard young people. Most significantly, almost all Comhairlí are now consistently meeting on a regular basis.
3. Work programme of Comhairle na nÓg

The work programme of Comhairle na nÓg is cyclical in nature (see Figure 14). Starting at the beginning of that cycle, a Comhairle na nÓg AGM is held where issues are discussed and perhaps prioritised by a large group of young people, after which a smaller Comhairle committee of young people is (s)elected to pursue those issues and particular outcomes throughout the year. The Comhairle committee may spend some further time prioritising the issues before deciding on the precise change or outcome that they aspire to on each issue (or even one issue) and then develop an action plan that will help them achieve that target. Members of the committee usually have a lot of preparation work to do on the issue before bringing it to a stage where they can present their findings or proposed changes and desired outcome to relevant decision-makers who may be able to help them achieve their targeted outcome. The committee often charts and presents their progress on the Comhairle website to the wider cohort of young people who attended the AGM, using promotional materials such as e-newsletters, or in the print media (e.g. letters and articles to newspapers). The committee should also have a chance to present progress on the issues to the following year’s AGM. This process helps the AGM attendees and Comhairle committee members decide whether they wish to pursue further progress on that particular issue or whether they will choose new issues for their second term of office.
Work programme of Comhairle na nÓg

**Figure 14: Work programme cycle of Comhairle na nÓg**

**YEAR 1**

**JANUARY**
Start of new funding year

**DECEMBER**
Funding decision from OMCYA

**NOVEMBER**
- Submit Annual Report and Funding Application to OMCYA
- Delegates work on recommendations from Year 1

**OCTOBER/NOVEMBER**
- Narrowing down issues selected at AGM
- New recommendations voted by delegates
- Dáil na nÓg Delegate Training

**SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER**
Comhairle na nÓg AGMs
- Issues selected by young people
- New recommendations voted by delegates
- New recommendations voted by delegates
- Delegates work on recommendations from Year 1

**JANUARY to MAY**
- Making progress on young people’s issue
- Researching issue
- Meeting decision-makers about issue
- Getting support from key stakeholders
- Achieving an outcome, impact or change on issue

**JUNE to AUGUST**
Summer break

**YEAR 2**

**JANUARY**
Start of new funding year

**DECEMBER**
Funding decision from OMCYA

**NOVEMBER**
- Submit Annual Report and Funding Application to OMCYA
- Delegates work on recommendations from Year 1

**OCTOBER/NOVEMBER**
- Narrowing down issues selected at AGM
- Young people to pick one key issue
- Develop workplan on issue selected
- Dáil na nÓg Delegate Training

**SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER**
Comhairle na nÓg AGMs
- Report on progress
- New issues selected by young people or building on existing issues

**JANUARY to MAY**
- Making progress on young people’s issue
- Researching issue
- Meeting decision-makers about issue
- Getting support from key stakeholders
- Achieving an outcome, impact or change on issue

**JUNE to AUGUST**
Summer break
Annual General Meeting (AGM)

Profile of young people attending AGMs

The Comhairle na nÓg AGM is the first stage of the Comhairle work programme because it is usually where the Comhairle committee is (s)elected and sometimes where the issues to be pursued are first discussed. During 2009-2010, 28 AGMs were held (see Table 2). Four of the participating Comhairlí did not stage an AGM during the year; in two instances (Donegal and Dublin City), this was because it was the ‘middle-year’ of a 2-year term (although it is recommended to host an AGM every year), while South Dublin and Westmeath will not stage their AGMs until October 2010 (too late to be included in this report).

Table 2 shows the profile of the young people who attended the 28 Comhairlí na nÓg AGMs held during 2009-2010. As can be seen, an average of 81 young people attended a Comhairle AGM during the year, although this is as high as 203 in Wicklow and as low as 15 in Galway City. Not surprisingly, the age and gender profiles of AGM attendees are similar to the overall membership profile (see Table 1), with the average ratio of males (45%) to females (55%) being identical and the age groups of 12-15 and 16-18 being similar. Clare Comhairle has a high number of females (71%) compared to males (29%) in attendance, as does Dun Laoghaire/Rathdown (69% females and 31% males). The age profile is more evenly split at the AGMs, with an average of 50% of both 12-15 and 16-18 year-olds attending, although the 12-15 cohort is very under-represented in Limerick City, Longford and South Tipperary.
Table 2: Profile of young people attending Comhairle AGMs (2009 – September 2010)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Comhairle na nÓg</th>
<th>Nos. of young people at AGM</th>
<th>Male (%)</th>
<th>Female (%)</th>
<th>12-15 years (%)</th>
<th>16-18 years (%)</th>
<th>Seldom-heard (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Carlow</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clare</td>
<td>68</td>
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<td>71</td>
<td>86</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cork City</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>60</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cork County</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>not available</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donegal</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>AGM not held</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dublin City</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>AGM not held</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dun Laoghaire/ Rathdown</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fingal</td>
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<td>60</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>100</td>
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<tr>
<td>Galway City</td>
<td>15</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Not listed for AGM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Galway County</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Report not available</td>
</tr>
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<td>63</td>
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<tr>
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<td>1</td>
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<td>47</td>
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<td>49</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leitrim</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limerick City</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>63</td>
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<tr>
<td>Limerick County</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Longford</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Louth</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mayo</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meath</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>56</td>
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<td>23</td>
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<td>Monaghan</td>
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<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Tipperary</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>not available</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offaly</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roscommon</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sligo</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Dublin</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>AGM not held</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Tipperary</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Waterford City</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Waterford County</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Westmeath</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>AGM not held</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wexford</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wicklow</td>
<td>203</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>AVERAGE</strong></td>
<td><strong>81</strong></td>
<td><strong>45%</strong></td>
<td><strong>55%</strong></td>
<td><strong>50%</strong></td>
<td><strong>50%</strong></td>
<td><strong>30%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Attendance of seldom-heard young people
Bearing in mind the difficulties in measuring the inclusion of seldom-heard young people (see Chapter 2), an average of 30% of the young people who attended AGMs were from seldom-heard groups. This percentage is higher than the 21% who are members of Comhairlí (see Table 1), which is likely explained by the fact that many seldom-heard young people are happy to come to the AGM, but either do not want to or do not get (s)elected to the main Comhairle na nÓg committee. That said, the average of seldom-heard young people at an AGM is somewhat artificially inflated in Table 2 by Fingal Comhairle, which stated that 100% of its AGM attendees were seldom-heard on the basis that ‘all of the young people feel that they are seldom-heard’. In any event, there are still a considerable number of instances where seldom-heard young people are extremely under-represented at AGMs, including in Clare, Kerry, Kilkenny and Waterford County.

Where young people come from
Of the 2,280 young people who attended AGMs around the country, some 70% were recruited through schools (see Figure 15). A further 18% came from youth clubs, although some of the ‘others’ (5%) also came from Special Youth Projects (SPYs). Another 4% came from Youthreach centres, while 3% came directly from Garda Youth Diversion Projects.

Figure 15: Where AGM attendees come from (%)

The Comhairlí na nÓg were also asked to provide a breakdown of what seldom-heard groups attended the AGMs. Many Comhairilí did provide this information, but many were either guessing or simply unable to provide such details. If young people come from a particular organisation or project (e.g. a Traveller group or an early school-leavers project), these young people are easily quantified. However, it is less easy to identify young people in care or who are LGBT without asking more direct questions. In light of this, young people from a particular Comhairle na nÓg made a plea that this information on seldom-heard young people no longer be sought because ‘these questions are off-putting to participation and invasive’.

---

2 ‘Seldom-heard’ young people is a term used to describe young people who tend not to have many opportunities to have their voices heard, including young people with disabilities, from an economically disadvantaged or culturally different background, young people in care, lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered (LGBT) young people, as well as those from more rural backgrounds and ethnic minorities.
How young people are selected for AGMs

For the most part, the Comhairlí na nÓg issue a general invitation to schools, youth groups and a host of other organisations that work with and/or represent young people, including organisations representing seldom-heard young people. Other Comhairlí just send correspondence to all youth organisations and schools in their locality and emphasize that all age groups are welcome. However, several other Comhairlí allocate a certain number of places per electoral area or designate a certain number of places per school. Some Comhairlí are even more specific, as illustrated by the Roscommon example below:

**CASE STUDY**

**ROSCOMMON Comhairle na nÓg:** 15 places were allocated to each school/youth centre, excluding those who were already serving on the Comhairle committee. The young people were then allocated to these 15 places per school according to:

- level of interest shown;
- age range (keeping in mind the need to increase the membership of young people aged 12-15);
- seldom-heard young people;
- those willing to put their names forward for the Comhairle committee.

For any schools or youth centres that were unavailable on the day, extra places were reserved for them on the committee.

Issues discussed at AGMs

Numerous issues were discussed at the AGMs, including traditional favourites such as ‘alcohol and drugs’, ‘education’, ‘the lack of affordable facilities’ and ‘mental health’. In addition, there were a plethora of other issues, as outlined in Table 3.
### Table 3: Issues discussed at Comhairle AGMs (no. of times brought up in brackets)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Health</strong></th>
<th><strong>Having a voice</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Drugs and alcohol (x6)</td>
<td>Do young people have a say in matters that affect them?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Substance abuse and its effects on young people</td>
<td>Giving young people a voice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Headshops</td>
<td>Lowering voting age</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Under-age alcohol and drug use</td>
<td>Children’s rights</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smoking</td>
<td>Getting your voice heard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental health (x6)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental health and the community</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suicide and depression</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promoting positive mental health</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promoting youth health</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth health and well-being</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cervical cancer vaccination (x2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual health</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Facilities and local government</strong></th>
<th><strong>Safety issues</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Facilities (x5)</td>
<td>Road safety</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of facilities (x3)</td>
<td>Bullying (x3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sport and recreation for young people (x2)</td>
<td>Irish identity – what it means to be Irish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth facilities (x3)</td>
<td>Street violence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost of activities</td>
<td>Internet safety and social networking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sports facilities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of inexpensive activities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safe places to hang out</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creating youth spaces</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transport (x2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of transport for young people</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Green areas and community facilities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infrastructure and town layout</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role of local councillors</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local democracy and how young people can get involved</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth centres</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Education</strong></th>
<th><strong>Attitudes</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Education/education system (x3)</td>
<td>Racism (x2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education cuts (x2)</td>
<td>Agesism (x2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual education</td>
<td>Discrimination of young people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cutbacks to school resources</td>
<td>Stereotypes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disability access in schools</td>
<td>Deep-seated attitudes (e.g. homophobia)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exam stress</td>
<td>Negative stereotyping of young people/ challenging negative stereotypes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Young people and the workplace</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Young people and the recession (x3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lack of jobs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Gaps in weekend services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Young people’s rights in the workplace</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Employment and associated legislation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Other</strong></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Peer pressure (x2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Image pressures</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interculturalism</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inclusion and diversity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irish culture – what is it?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diversity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth power</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young people and the media</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth justice</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth arts</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anti-social Behaviour Orders (ASBOs)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Juvenile record</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Country life</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vandalism</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gay rights</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sports</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In addition to the traditionally popular topics, the effect of the recession on young people was also identified as an issue of concern in a number of locations. Transport, or the lack of it, was also a prominent issue, as well as a number of safety issues, ‘having a voice’ and several attitudinal issues such as the negative stereotyping of young people.

**How issues were identified for AGMs**

The methodologies used to identify issues or themes for the AGMs are as diverse as the issues themselves and demonstrate that there is no one standard means of conducting this task. While a number of Comhairli na nÓg leave the task of selecting the themes to the existing Comhairle na nÓg members or involve the wider audience at the AGM to select their own themes, there are also a number of instances where other stakeholders (including adults) play a key role. Examples of the methodologies include:

- **Selection by existing Comhairle members**
  - Comhairle committee selected topics (x3);
  - Comhairle members prioritised a given list;
  - existing Comhairle members voted on old and new topics;
  - outgoing Comhairle committee selected the issues for discussion;
  - ‘Open space’ methodology used for Comhairle members at a dedicated meeting.

- **Pre-selection of themes by AGM attendees**
  - delegates asked to identify issues at registration;
  - theme selection forms completed in advance;
  - themes selected in electoral areas prior to AGM.

- **Methodologies used at the AGM**
  - young people asked to prioritise issues at AGM (x2);
  - World Café methodology at AGM;
  - young people asked to volunteer topics for discussion;
  - ‘Open space’ methodology at AGM;
  - young people asked to choose from a combination of ‘Dáil na nÓg’ themes and local issues raised by young people.

- **Involvement of other stakeholders**
  - on-line survey devised by Comhairle members and completed by young people;
  - steering committee selected 4 topics and left room for ‘others’; all schools and youth projects then had a vote;
  - consultation with youth organisations;
  - consultation with student councils and youth services;
  - consultation with Leaving Cert. Applied classes and 3 primary schools;
  - steering committee members identified topics, which were then selected by Comhairle members;
  - debate and discussion at residential meeting with seldom-heard young people;
  - young people voted on topics during Coordinators’ visits to schools/youth centres.

- **Other**
  - Dáil na nÓg themes used;
  - devising a ‘Youth Manifesto’.
Issues of importance to young people

How issues are prioritised

It is clear from the array of issues discussed at AGMs throughout the country (see Table 3) that not all of them can be pursued or progressed in any meaningful way. To this end, if more than one or two issues are discussed at an AGM, some mechanism to whittle down or prioritise the issues is needed. Figure 16 shows the general breakdown of how issues are actually prioritised. As can be seen, in 23% of cases, the issues are prioritised at the AGM itself and the Comhairle na nÓg committee leave with a mandate of what issues to pursue and what outcome is sought by the AGM attendees. However, in the majority of instances (65%) the Comhairle committee is left to decide what issues are of most importance and/or what are the better outcomes to pursue. The remaining 12% (‘Other’) have a variety of methods for prioritising issues, including via requests from Comhairle members or other young people, or deciding to continue to further pursue an issue from the previous year.

Figure 16: How issues are prioritised (%)

The details behind these various mechanisms to conduct this prioritisation process are outlined in Table 4.
Table 4: Prioritisation process of issues

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Prioritisation by Comhairle committee</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Review of issues discussed at AGM by elected Comhairle committee (x17).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Comhairle committee ‘brain-storm’ on AGM shortlist and vote on top 2 issues.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Comhairle committee short-listed issues on basis of what was important and what was realistic.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Considered the strongest themes from the AGM that had the most achievable outcomes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Prioritised AGM themes at a residential meeting and broke them down into short- and long-term aims.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Young people discussed the AGM themes at a team-building day and prioritised accordingly.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Prioritisation at the AGM</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Issues prioritised at the AGM (x2).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Sticky Dot Voting at the AGM (x2).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Continuation of issue pursued in previous year (x2).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Election Manifesto (x2).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Requests by elected members.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Opportunities presented to work on certain issues.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Approached by young people in the area to work on certain issues.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Issues chosen by adults.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Progressing the issues of importance to young people**

Having gone through the process of prioritising the issues of most importance to young people, actually progressing these issues plays a key role in delivering on Comhairlé na nÓg’s objective of ensuring that young people have a voice in the development of local services and policies. It is vital that young people have the opportunity to identify their own issues of importance rather than only having the opportunity to participate in consultations on issues that have been identified by others. Table 5 highlights a sample of the many issues that have been pursued by Comhairlí na nÓg during 2009-2010, the changes sought, the outcomes achieved and the decision-makers who were engaged with in order to realise these outcomes.
## Table 5: Progressing issues of importance to young people

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LOCATION</th>
<th>ISSUE and CHANGE SOUGHT</th>
<th>ACTIONS TAKEN</th>
<th>OUTCOME</th>
<th>DECISION-MAKERS INVOLVED</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cork City</td>
<td>Mental Health: Creating a Mental Health Services Directory</td>
<td>○ Gathering information for the directory.</td>
<td>○ Directory is complete and available in 3 student journals as a pilot project (approximately 2,500 students).</td>
<td>HSE, School principals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>○ Designed and published Mental Health Services Directory.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>○ Arranged for it to be printed in student journals.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cork County</td>
<td>Bullying in Schools: Ensuring all schools had an anti-bullying policy in place</td>
<td>YEAR 1: ○ Conducted survey of secondary students in 5 schools.</td>
<td>○ Received commitment from 7 schools to make significant changes to their bullying policies, e.g. changing policy to reflect Comhairle na nÓg research and posting the policy in a visible area.</td>
<td>School principals, School management committees, Student councils</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>○ Analysed the results and made specific recommendations on bullying policies.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>○ Sent results to all schools, but received little response.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>○ Discussed progress at AGM.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>YEAR 2: ○ Decided to continue working on the same issue.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>○ Invited school principals to a meeting to discuss the issue, but again no response.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>○ Sent out a summary letter outlining the commitments sought from school principals, management committees and student council liaison teachers.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donegal</td>
<td>Youth Worker Cutbacks: Retention of youth worker</td>
<td>○ Established links to key decision-makers.</td>
<td>○ Youth worker not retained.</td>
<td>Gweedore Youth Project Forum, VEC Youth Officer, Minister for Children and Youth Affairs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donegal</td>
<td>Mental Health: To improve teenage awareness on mental health and related services</td>
<td>○ Recruited young people outside Comhairle na nÓg to the campaign.</td>
<td>○ Poster due to be published in September 2010.</td>
<td>Community-based group taking action in area of mental health</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>○ Discussed advertising campaigns and where funding should be directed.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>○ Staged an Agenda Day to have a wider discussion with a larger group of young people.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>○ Developed a poster with ‘Helplines’ for distribution throughout county.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>○ Spoke at conference in relation to work.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dun Laoghaire/</td>
<td>Stereotyping of and Adult Attitudes Towards Young People: Changes in adult attitudes,</td>
<td>○ Held a seminar on ‘Stereotyping of young people’ with representatives from the business community, the media and older people.</td>
<td>○ Changes hard to measure.</td>
<td>An Garda Síochána, Network for Older People, Dun Laoghaire/Rathdown Councillors, Business community, Media</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rathdown</td>
<td>more positive portrayal of young people in the media and more tolerance of young people in the business community</td>
<td>○ Held a Delegate/Councillor session on issues.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dun Laoghaire/</td>
<td>Increasing Numbers of Seldom-Heard Young People in Comhairle na nÓg</td>
<td>○ Identified youth workers who work with seldom-heard young people.</td>
<td>○ Some 50 young people have completed capacity-building training for Comhairle na nÓg and have been invited to the next AGM.</td>
<td>Youth services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rathdown</td>
<td></td>
<td>○ Issues discussed with Social Inclusion Unit and the Local Drugs Task Force to help identify barriers to participation.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>○ Comhairle na nÓg delegates visited Youth Leadership and Participation programmes to promote Comhairle na nÓg.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

continued
### Fingal
**YOUTH CAFÉ IN FINGAL:**
- Wanted to have a say in the development of a youth café model.
  - Established a Joint Working Group to work on issue.
  - Conducted study visits to other youth cafés.
  - Developed a plan for the youth café.
- Have informed the model for the youth café in Fingal.

### Galway City
**PUBLIC TRANSPORT:**
- To achieve recognition that public transport is an issue for young people and to seek improvements in the service.
  - YEAR 1: Made DVD called ‘Where have all the buses gone?’
  - YEAR 2: Got involved in ‘Smarter Travel’ bid in Galway City.
- The issues identified by Comhairle na nÓg have been included in the Galway City Smarter Travel Transport bid.

### Kildare
**FACILITIES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE:**
- Identified facilities that they would like to have access to or have developed in the community.
- Established different priorities at local and county level, e.g.
  - ATHY: A skate park had been ‘promised’ for many years, but was not forthcoming. Comhairle members held a meeting with relevant Councillors to discuss issue.
  - RATHANGAN: Comhairle na nÓg got involved in the application for a youth café.
  - KILDARE TOWN: Comhairle members brought the issue of ‘lack of facilities’ to the Community Forum, which brought it to an ‘area implementation’ team for Kildare Town.
  - NAAS: Comhairle na nÓg made a submission to Naas Town Plan for 2011-2017 in relation to facilities for young people.
  - ATHY: One Councillor agreed to spearhead the campaign and there are currently plans for the skate park to be built in 2010.
  - RATHANGAN: Comhairle has been promised it will be centrally involved and the youth café application is successful.
  - KILDARE TOWN: A piece of outdoor land has become available and Comhairle members are currently working with the Council to see what it can be used for.
  - NAAS: No feedback as yet.

### Limerick County
**PROMOTING COMHAIRLE (as it was the first year of the ‘enhanced’ Comhairle) and ISSUES OF IMPORTANCE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE:**
- Formed a working group to research relevant information on the Comhairle na nÓg and ‘youth matters’, to be put on memory sticks for easy distribution.
  - Devised a strategy to distribute memory sticks to schools.
  - Applied for funding to YouthBank to fund the purchase of the memory sticks.
  - Planning a documentary on Comhairle na nÓg and youth matters.
- Presentation highlighting the proposal made to YouthBank funding committee.
  - Application for funding has been submitted.

### Longford
**DISABILITY:**
- To raise awareness of the issues facing young people with a disability.
  - Developed and launched an interactive educational resource on DVD for students and teachers.
- Practical resource (DVD) for schools.

### Monaghan
**MENTAL HEALTH:**
- To produce a study guide to help cope with exam stress.
  - Carried out consultations with select schools.
  - Identified appropriate tips and information for the guide.
  - Got copies of existing materials.
  - Worked with a graphic designer.
  - Sought endorsement from the OMCYA.
- Study guide to be launched in September 2010.

**DECISION-MAKERS INVOLVED**
- Fingal County Council
- Galway City Councillors
- Galway City Council Transport Unit
- County Council
- Local Town Councils
- Youth Café consortium
- YouthBank
- CDB
- Irish Wheelchair Association
- School authorities
- County Council
- Student councils
- Year Head Coordinators
- School principals
- Career Guidance teachers
- OMCYA

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*Table 5 (continued)*
Table 5 (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LOCATION</th>
<th>ISSUE and CHANGE SOUGHT</th>
<th>ACTIONS TAKEN</th>
<th>OUTCOME</th>
<th>DECISION-MAKERS INVOLVED</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ROSCOMMON</td>
<td>RURAL TRANSPORT: To address the rural transport needs of young people</td>
<td>3 members of the Comhairle na nÓg committee were elected to the County Transport Forum.</td>
<td>Young people have been made aware of existing transport facilities and are using them more extensively. Transport Forum has taken on board issues raised by young people and are planning a new route accordingly.</td>
<td>Transport Forum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SOUTH TIPPERARY: BULLYING: To raise awareness of bullying among young people</td>
<td>Contacted the HSE for factual information. Developed a DVD highlighting what bullying is and the effects on young people. DVD to be launched in September 2010.</td>
<td>Copies of the DVD will be made available to all schools.</td>
<td>HSE Schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WATERFORD COUNTY</td>
<td>RURAL TRANSPORT: To make rural transport more accessible to young people</td>
<td>Made submission to the ‘Smarter Travel’ Working Group. Made presentation to the ‘Deise Link’ AGM. Invited ‘Deise Link’ to Comhairle na nÓg meeting.</td>
<td>‘Deise Link’ is in the process of designing a youth-friendly timetable for west Waterford and also examining issue of ‘bus-stop’ signs.</td>
<td>Smarter Travel Working Group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WEXFORD</td>
<td>YOUTH CAFÉ: To establish a designated youth café in New Ross</td>
<td>Youth café sub-committee established. Sub-committee conducted a survey of youth facilities in the town. Lobbied Town Council with letters.</td>
<td>CDB endorsed the Comhairle na nÓg youth café application as the county project to go forward to the national selection process.</td>
<td>County Council VEC RAPID Youth Service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WICKLOW</td>
<td>AGE DISCRIMINATION: To highlight the use of mosquito alarms as a means of age discrimination</td>
<td>Mapped presence of mosquito alarms in the county. Designed poster for schools and youth services where young people could help identify the locations of the devices. Local TDs were asked to table Dáil questions to ascertain the legality of the devices and to make local representatives aware of young people’s disapproval of the devices. Once the mapping was complete, the Comhairle na nÓg wrote to Garda stations throughout the county informing them of the locations of the alarms, with a copy of the Dáil question and answer enclosed.</td>
<td>Clarity gained on legality of mosquito alarms. Multiple parties now aware of the existence of the alarms. Gardaí have offered assurances to work with Comhairle na nÓg to seek removal of alarms.</td>
<td>Public representatives Joint Policing Committees Minister for Justice and Law Reform An Garda Síochána</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WICKLOW</td>
<td>HAVING AVOICE: Influencing the planning process on the needs of pedestrians and cyclists</td>
<td>Group met with the County Development Plan team who advised them on how to prepare a submission. Group continued to meet and prepared their submission.</td>
<td>Views of the Comhairle na nÓg have been included in the County Development Plan.</td>
<td>CDB</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 5 illustrates many things, not least that a number of excellent projects were pursued and brought to fruition during the 2009-2010 period. A wide range of issues were worked upon and a diversity of methods used to explore them and achieve the desired outcomes. Despite the apparent diversity, there are a number of issues that are commonly pursued by different Comhairlí na nÓg, including:

- **bullying** – Carlow, Cork City, Louth, South Tipperary, Waterford City;
- **facilities for young people** – Fingal, Kildare, Kilkenny, Longford, Mayo, Meath, Sligo, South Tipperary, Wexford, Wicklow;
- **mental health** – Cork City, Donegal, Kildare, Kilkenny, Leitrim, Mayo, Meath, Monaghan, Sligo;
- **rural transport** – Cork County, Galway City, Roscommon, Sligo, Waterford County.

It is also popular to conduct projects that result in practical resources, such as the study guide to reduce exam stress (Monaghan Comhairle) and DVDs on bullying (South Tipperary Comhairle) and on young people with disabilities (Longford Comhairle).

There are a number of valuable lessons to be learned from the projects listed in Table 5. Perhaps one of the most important is the fact that things do not always work out after the first attempt and sometimes take much longer than initially anticipated. Indeed, if things do not work out on the first attempt or by using one methodology, there is great merit in trying again, perhaps with a different methodology. This tenacity is well demonstrated by Cork City's project to ensure that all schools had an anti-bullying policy in place. Having failed to get any engagement with their requests for feedback on anti-bullying policies in schools on two occasions (through written correspondence or a call to a meeting), Comhairle members eventually got the schools to engage with them on the third attempt. However, all of these attempts took time and this project, which eventually resulted in a really positive outcome, actually took place over 2 years.

However, not everything always works out and the outcome desired is not always achieved. This is illustrated by Donegal's gallant attempts to retain a youth worker in a particular area, which has, as yet, not been achieved. Despite the failure to achieve what they set out to do, the attempt and process remain important steps for the local Comhairle na nÓg to have taken.

Table 5 illustrates multiple examples of a variety of issues pursued, outcomes achieved and some not achieved or not achieved as yet, of persistent efforts and of impact and influence. Indeed, it is this pursuit of issues and outcomes that represents Comhairle na nÓg’s greatest impact – facilitating young people to identify issues that are important to them and then work to affect positive change.

**Influence of Comhairle na nÓg**

The Comhairlí na nÓg were asked to rate their perceived level of influence on the changes that took place. Figure 17 shows that some 32% believed the efforts of the Comhairle na nÓg were ‘very influential’ in the changes that occurred, while another 61% felt that they were ‘somewhat influential’ in those changes. Only 7% did not think that the Comhairle had been influential at all in affecting change.
Links with decision-makers

Representation of young people on decision-making bodies

Forging links with decision-makers obviously makes the potential for impact and influence a lot more realistic and achievable. Having young people represented on decision-making bodies is obviously the most direct link between Comhairli na nÓg and decision-makers. Figure 18 shows that just under half of Comhairli (48%) now have young people represented on decision-making structures (excluding Comhairle na nÓg steering committees) on an ongoing basis, while 52% of Comhairli have no young people represented on any decision-making body.

Table 6 details the types of decision-making structures that young people are represented on, the role they play in them and how they are supported, as well as how young people report back to their Comhairli and any outcomes from their participation.
Table 6: Details of decision-making structures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Comhairle na nÓg</th>
<th>Name of structure</th>
<th>Role of young person</th>
<th>How young person is supported</th>
<th>How young person reports back</th>
<th>Outcome</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CARLOW</td>
<td>Youth Café Committee</td>
<td>To represent young people and their needs</td>
<td>• Committee skills training.</td>
<td>Verbal update at Comhairle meetings</td>
<td>Influencing decisions and raising issues of concern to young people.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DONEGAL</td>
<td>Sexual Health Forum</td>
<td>Two Comhairle members bring youth perspective as equal members of the forum</td>
<td>• Young people supported by peers to conduct particular tasks for the Forum.</td>
<td>Agenda item at local and county Comhairle meetings</td>
<td>Influencing decisions and raising issues of concern to young people.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DUN LAOGHAIRE/RATHDOWN</td>
<td>VEC Youth Work Sub-committee</td>
<td>Members bring youth perspective to sub-committee and report back to Comhairle</td>
<td>• Facilitated training.</td>
<td>Agenda item at each Comhairle meeting</td>
<td>Influencing decisions and raising issues of concern to young people.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FINGAL</td>
<td>Leader Partnership Community, Recreation and Amenities SPC</td>
<td>Assist and advise the Council in the formulation, development and review of policy</td>
<td>• Induction training for new SPC members provided by Council.</td>
<td>Verbal update at Comhairle meetings</td>
<td>Contributed to development of a new skate park in Swords.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KERRY</td>
<td>Community and Voluntary Forum</td>
<td>Takes a co-opted seat on the Forum</td>
<td>• Youth worker attends with young person.</td>
<td>Verbal update at Comhairle meetings</td>
<td>Raising awareness of the need for these bodies to engage properly with young people.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KILKENNY</td>
<td>Youth Festival Organising Committee</td>
<td>To represent young people and their needs</td>
<td>• Accompanied by support worker.</td>
<td>Agenda item at each Comhairle meeting</td>
<td>Additional workshops on ‘music’ at behest of representative.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LEITRIM</td>
<td>Youth Project Youth Forum</td>
<td>Chairperson organises meetings and reports to various bodies on issues arising from meetings</td>
<td>not available</td>
<td>Progress report given at each Comhairle meeting</td>
<td>Involved in research on youth cafés, with resulting guidelines sent to all youth clubs in Leitrim on how to set up a youth café.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LONGFORD</td>
<td>Youth Café Committee</td>
<td>Exchange of ideas between Comhairle and Youth Café committees</td>
<td>not available</td>
<td>Verbal update at Comhairle meetings</td>
<td>Young people more aware of the activities and support structures available to them at the youth café.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 6 (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Comhairle na nÓg</th>
<th>Name of structure</th>
<th>Role of young person</th>
<th>How young person is supported</th>
<th>How young person reports back</th>
<th>Outcome</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MAYO</td>
<td>Joint Policing Committee (JPC)</td>
<td>To represent young people and their needs</td>
<td>As needed.</td>
<td>Verbal update at Comhairle meetings</td>
<td>Contributed to a poster campaign.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MONAGHAN</td>
<td>Joint Policing Committee (JPC)</td>
<td>To represent young people and their needs</td>
<td>Training provided.</td>
<td>Agenda item at each Comhairle meeting</td>
<td>JPC has asked Comhairle to conduct research on its behalf.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ROSCOMMON</td>
<td>Transport Forum</td>
<td>To represent young people and their needs</td>
<td>Supported by Comhairle Coordinator as needed.</td>
<td>Agenda item at each Comhairle meeting</td>
<td>Involved in interviews for Jigsaw Coordinator. Seen as partners on all committees.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>VEC Steering Committee</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Headstrong National Advisory Committee</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Jigsaw</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SLIGO</td>
<td>Sub-group of Joint Policing Committee</td>
<td>To represent young people and their needs</td>
<td>Briefed in advance by the Development Worker, who also attends meetings.</td>
<td>Verbal update at Comhairle meetings</td>
<td>Raised profile of Comhairle.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WATERFORD CITY</td>
<td>Youth Strategy Committee</td>
<td>To represent young people and their needs</td>
<td>Briefed before meetings.</td>
<td>Verbal update at Comhairle meetings</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WESTMEATH</td>
<td>Community Health Forum and Primary Health Care Network</td>
<td>To represent young people and their needs</td>
<td>Accompanied by support worker. Travel provided. Member is rotated so school work is not affected.</td>
<td>Verbal update at Comhairle meetings</td>
<td>None to date</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WEXFORD</td>
<td>Sports Partnership</td>
<td>To represent young people and their needs</td>
<td>Supported by worker.</td>
<td>Verbal update at Comhairle meetings</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WICKLOW</td>
<td>Sports Partnership</td>
<td>To represent young people and their needs</td>
<td>Where possible, two Comhairle members sit on the committee to support each other. Additional methodologies to support the young people are currently being investigated since Comhairle delegates have not been interested in retaining their membership of a number of committees.</td>
<td>Agenda item at each Comhairle meeting</td>
<td>Difficult to quantify, but informal feedback suggests that the young people find it useful to be involved in the JPCs, but some other committees are ‘too stuffy’ for them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Community and Social Development SPC</td>
<td>Full board membership, except for the SPC</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rural Transport Committee</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>CYPF</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>JPCs (town)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Youth Strategy Group</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Youth Café Steering Committee</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 6 illustrates that Comhairlí na nÓg members are represented on a good diversity of agencies and bodies. Some of the agencies are quite formal in nature, including a number of Strategic Policy Committees (SPCs) and Joint Policing Committees (JPCs), but all of the bodies are involved in making decisions on matters relevant to young people.

The role of young people in these agencies is largely to bring their voice to the meeting and to outline the needs of young people. While this youth perspective is hugely important, the young people are also well capable of advising the work of any agency, as well as providing an exchange of ideas between Comhairle na nÓg and the other representatives on the decision-making body.

The young people are also well supported on these bodies. While only one agency offered formal induction training, all of the young people are well briefed in advance and assisted by a support worker whenever needed. In addition, a support worker actually attends the meetings in 5 of the settings listed in Table 6. Wicklow Comhairle na nÓg has a policy of having 2 young people on each decision-making body so that the young people can effectively be a support to each other.

Many of the outcomes from the young people’s involvement in these structures are intangible and difficult to quantify. In the majority of cases, the outcome is simply that young people have had the opportunity to influence decisions and raise issues of concern to them, like any of their adult peers might. However, a number of additional benefits are also evident, including:

- Membership of decision-making bodies can give rise to other opportunities for the Comhairle na nÓg, as evidenced by being invited to give an input into the Environment Plan (Kerry) or being asked to conduct research on behalf of the Joint Policing Committee (Monaghan).
- Young people are more aware of the key local issues and can report back to the Comhairle na nÓg committee in their verbal updates and progress reports, both of which are fixed agenda items in the majority of Comhairlí.
- The agencies are more aware of the Comhairle na nÓg’s agenda and key issues of interest.

Despite these benefits, some young people reported that it is not always interesting to them to be involved in some of these committees. In some cases, the young people found the meetings ‘boring and stuffy’ and had no interest in continuing to participate. While it is obviously hoped that agencies will make the meetings youth-friendly and at least accessible to young people, further research needs to be conducted on what makes meetings ‘youth-friendly’ and how agencies can be encouraged to put this into practice. In addition, it would be useful to conduct further research on how young people can be most effective on these committees.
Additional links to decision-makers

Representation on decision-making bodies is only one way of having ongoing links with decision-makers. Comhairlí na nÓg were asked to list the other ways they had of ongoing links with decision-makers, as well as any positive outcomes for young people that have resulted. Again, many of the ‘outcomes’ are quite intangible and somewhat difficult to quantify. However, Comhairlí are linked with decision-makers in a variety of ways, including:

- **Engaging with relevant organisations on an ongoing basis**
  Depending on the issues being pursued, Comhairlí na nÓg link formally or informally with a large number of diverse organisations, such as:

  - Arts offices
  - Belong To/LGBT Ireland
  - County/City Councils
  - Drugs Task Force
  - Health Service Executive (HSE)
  - Joint Policing Committees
  - Leader Partnerships
  - Road Safety Committees
  - Social Inclusion Measures (SIMs)
  - Social Inclusion Sub-committees
  - Sports Partnerships
  - Strategic Policy Committees
  - Tourism and Heritage
  - Transport groups

- **Steering committees**
  The Comhairle na nÓg steering committee is one of the principal means of linking with decision-makers. Indeed, this is one of the main benefits of having a steering committee because if the key stakeholders have been involved with the process from the outset, they are much more likely to engage with the Comhairle members to help them progress any relevant issues.

**CASE STUDY**

**SLIGO Comhairle na nÓg**: All of the key agencies in the county, including the chairs of the SPC and JPC, are represented on Sligo’s ‘Expert Advisory Group’, which operates as the Comhairle na nÓg steering committee. These key agencies provide a direct link from the Comhairle to the decision-making bodies. Issues arising at each Comhairle meeting are fed back to the steering committee and links are made as appropriate. Most recently, the Sligo SPC has approached Comhairle na nÓg to be the official voice of youth on its ‘gum campaign’.

- **Making presentations to the CDB**
  Most Comhairlí na nÓg have been asked to present their work or their key issues to a host of key agencies, including City/County Development Board (CDB) agencies. This is a valuable way of raising the awareness of Comhairle na nÓg and making prospective links with decision-makers.
**CASE STUDIES**

**MEATH Comhairle na nÓg** was asked by the County Council to present its work in all 5 electoral area meetings and was subsequently asked to return and present the outcomes of the Comhairle’s work at the end of the year.

**ROSCOMMON and SOUTH TIPPERARY Comhairlí na nÓg** also made presentations to their respective County Councils on key issues of importance and both have been asked to return to present their results.

**LOUTH Comhairle na nÓg** made a video presentation to Louth County Council and make presentations to the full Council at the April meeting every year.

**MAYO Comhairle na nÓg** made presentations to its CDB, which resulted in the Comhairle being asked to participate in a number of initiatives (including the Joint Policing Committee in relation to ‘knife crime’) and being offered a seat on the Transportation SPC.

- **Key agencies presenting to Comhairlí**
  Similarly, a number of agencies make presentations to Comhairlí na nÓg. This is sometimes in a bid to share information, but also to seek the input of Comhairle members in their work.

**CASE STUDY**

**MAYO Comhairle na nÓg**: A wide range of agencies have made presentations to Mayo Comhairle na nÓg throughout the year, including the VEC, Road Safety Officer, ISPCC, a local Senator and the Community Forum.

- **Making submissions**
  Comhairlí na nÓg are sometimes invited to make submissions to CDB strategy plans, policies and other local plans, and often decide to make a submission of their own accord.

**CASE STUDIES**

**DONEGAL and WEXFORD Comhairli na nÓg** were involved in youth café assessments and submitted applications for funding for youth cafés in their areas.

**CORK COUNTY, DONEGAL and SLIGO** Comhairli na nÓg made submissions to their local CDBs on the National Substance Misuse Strategy Plan.

**CORK CITY Comhairle na nÓg** made a submission on a policing plan for the city.
Providing regular updates to CDBs
Presentations by Comhairlí to their CDBs do not have to be formal or one-off events. Indeed, many Comhairlí provide regular updates to their CDBs and also receive regular updates from them so that Comhairle members know what issues are currently being discussed at county level.

CASE STUDIES
LONGFORD Comhairle na nÓg provides ongoing feedback and input to SPCs and the SIM Working Group, as well as to the Youth Service committees.
LAOIS Comhairle na nÓg makes regular updates to the CDB.
LOUTH Comhairle na nÓg makes presentations to the full Council of the CDB in April each year.
WEXFORD Comhairle na nÓg circulates a report on CDB activity at each meeting so that young people are informed on these issues and can choose to make an input as appropriate.

Hosting events for key decision-makers
Some Comhairlí na nÓg host events that provide a space for Comhairle members and decision-makers to meet each other, either formally or informally. Political speed-dating events have been quite popular over the past number of years.

CASE STUDIES
OFFALY Comhairle na nÓg hosted a large event, with over 200 people attending, to raise the profile of its work. Many key agencies were present, including representatives of the HSE and politicians. The event allowed these decision-makers to see the value of participation by the young Comhairle members.
KILDARE Comhairle na nÓg: The Rathangan branch of this Comhairle hosted an event that allowed young people to identify the decision-makers they needed to link with in order to pursue matters of importance to them. This event was attended by both politicians and service providers.
Coordinator membership of key agencies

There are some instances where young people are not in a position to (or are not interested in or are not invited to) sit on particular boards or committees. In some cases, the Comhairle Coordinator sits on such committees and provides the link between the Comhairle and the decision-makers.

CASE STUDY

SOUTH DUBLIN Comhairle na nÓg: In South Dublin, the Coordinator sits on a wide range of boards or committees (such as the Children’s Services Committee and the Tallaght Youth Forum) with a view to handing over these roles to Comhairle members when they are more embedded in the programme. The Coordinator also sits on the Social Inclusion Measures (SIM) group and reports back to Comhairle members as necessary.

Supporting the work of other youth participation structures

It is interesting to note from the information in Table 6 that Comhairle members are represented on 10 different ‘youth-related’ projects (such as youth cafés, youth strategy groups or youth festival organising groups) where it is especially important that the views of young people are taken into account. These provide good examples of where Comhairle na nÓg is supporting the work of other youth participation structures and also playing a key advisory role or making inputs into the direction of these services and structures for young people. It is also evident that members from a number of different Comhairlí, such as Kildare and Wexford, were involved in the process to submit applications for youth café funding.

Another way in which Comhairlí support the work of other youth participation structures is through the automatic connection to the Dáil na nÓg Council. In this instance, almost all of the Comhairlí reserve an agenda spot for a report from the Dáil na nÓg Councillor. Similarly, a significant number of Comhairlí have connections to student councils, which promote the work of Comhairle na nÓg and encourage students to get involved. The evidence suggests that a number of Comhairle members are also involved in Jigsaw (Donegal, Meath and Roscommon) and Headstrong (Laois and Roscommon), both of which are organisations focused on the mental health of young people, which has always been a popular Comhairle na nÓg and Dáil na nÓg theme. A small number of Comhairle members are also members of the OMCYA’s Children and Young People’s Forum.
Other activities

In addition to their work on various local issues of importance and linking with decision-makers on these issues and others, Comhairle na nÓg are also involved in a range of other activities, including:

- Awareness workshops, e.g. Mayo met with GLEN for an information session on homophobic bullying and Roscommon held an awareness workshop on the same theme.
- Cross-border work through separate funding in Leitrim, Monaghan and Sligo.
- Dáil na nÓg (annual Youth Parliament).
- Fund-raising events.
- Launching previous work, e.g. Westmeath launched a leaflet on ‘Alcohol’ during 2009-2010, a project that had been worked on over the previous year.
- Media projects, e.g. Galway City were involved in a radio project to help ‘voice the voice of young people’.
- Surveys and research, e.g. Kerry conducted a survey on the need for youth cafés in the county.
- Team-building and training.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations specific to the work programme of Comhairle na nÓg might therefore include:

- A specific strategy to ensure gender, age and geographical balance, as well as representation from seldom-heard young people, needs to be devised for each AGM.
- The selection of issues for the AGM and the Comhairle na nÓg committee should be youth-led and not led by adults.
- The number and breadth of issues discussed at an AGM need to be prioritised and reduced before the Comhairle committee can begin their work and aim to make any meaningful progress on issues.
- A targeted outcome on an issue may not necessarily be achieved after a given timeframe. Young people should be involved in the process to decide whether they want to continue pursuing the issue for a further period of time.
- A sensitive system that avoids labelling young people, but that allows for some profiling of Comhairle AGM participants, should be devised.
- Further research needs to be conducted on what makes meetings youth-friendly and accessible to young people, and how agencies can be encouraged to provide these conditions.
- Further research should also be done on how young people can be most effective and have most impact on adult committees where decisions are made.
Summary

AGMs were held in the majority of Local Authority areas and had a good gender and age balance, as well as being representative of seldom-heard young people. The majority of attendees at the AGMs came from schools, although there are many strategies in place to select a diversity of young people. A great array of issues were discussed at the AGMs; these were selected using a multiplicity of mechanisms before they were prioritised using an equally diverse array of mechanisms. Comhairlí na nÓg then engaged in numerous strategies and programmes of events to bring these issues to a targeted outcome. Many of these were achieved, more have yet to be achieved and some were not achieved.

Comhairle members are also represented on a variety of decision-making bodies, where they represent young people and their needs. Comhairle members also attempt to exert influence and impact through presentations and regular updates to the CDBs, exchanging ideas with and hosting events between key agencies. Similarly, Comhairle members support the work of other youth participation structures, as well as being involved in numerous other activities, including cross-border work, awareness workshops, research and surveys, and the annual Dáil na nÓg event.
4. Profile of the Comhairle na nÓg programme

Raising the profile of Comhairle

Comhairle na nÓg engaged in a number of strategies during the year 2009-2010 to raise the profile of its programme with schools, youth organisations and other key stakeholders (see Table 7).

Table 7: Promotion of Comhairle profile by young people

| Schools | • Sending correspondence with information on Comhairle na nÓg to all school principals, CSPE teachers, Transition Year coordinators and Student Council liaison teachers.  
          • Sending progress reports and any key information to the same school personnel.  
          • Visits by Comhairle Coordinator and/or Comhairle members to schools.  
          • Presentations to student councils.  
          • Providing information, posters or newsletters for notice-boards.  
          • Hosting a meeting of all school principals.  
          • Hosting a teacher and youth worker Information Day.  
          • Inviting all schools to the AGM. |
|---------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Youth organisations | • Engaging with youth workers on an ongoing basis.  
                      • Providing updates/information for youth workers.  
                      • Providing information, posters or newsletters for notice-boards.  
                      • Inviting all youth organisations to the AGM. |
| Decision-makers | • Providing a quarterly report to CDBs on Comhairle na nÓg.  
                   • Making annual presentations at the AGMs of CDBs.  
                   • Hosting information-sharing events between decision-makers and Comhairle members (e.g. Carlow Comhairle’s coffee morning).  
                   • Having seats on decision-making bodies.  
                   • Meetings of Comhairle steering committees. |
| Others | • Social networking sites, e.g. Facebook.  
         • Media exposure, including radio interviews and press articles.  
         • Having an information stand during national Volunteer Week.  
         • Profiling Comhairle na nÓg as part of road show to promote youth projects. |
The promotion of Comhairle na nÓg has been greatly assisted by the establishment of the enhanced national and local logos. In addition, many of the strategies for raising the profile of Comhairle are now routine and standard practice for the majority of Comhairlí. Maintaining ongoing correspondence and relationships with schools, youth services and decision-makers are both key to ensuring a consistent profile for Comhairle. Many Comhairlí now provide some form of information about their organisation, such as a poster or newsletter for a school or youth service notice-board, which is a good means of profiling themselves on an ongoing basis and keeping young people interested throughout the year. Some Comhairlí took this information-sharing a step further by hosting meetings with school principals or relevant teachers to help promote the programme and interest in the AGM.

The Comhairle steering committee is the standard method of profiling Comhairle na nÓg among key decision-makers (again, emphasizing the need for a steering committee in each Comhairle area). Many Comhairlí also make presentations or provide updates to CDBs to ensure the profile of Comhairle is maintained. More novel ideas include hosting information-sharing meetings between Comhairle and decision-makers to ensure they are aware of its precise role. Other popular means of profiling Comhairle na nÓg include social networking sites, such as Facebook.

Engagement with the media

In addition to social networking sites, there is still considerable engagement with the more traditional media outlets, such as radio and press. Taking all forms of media into account, Figure 19 shows that the vast majority of Comhairlí (84%) engage with the media in some way in order to promote Comhairle na nÓg or inform people about their work.

Figure 19: Engagement of Comhairle na nÓg with the media (%)

Of the 84% majority of Comhairlí that engage with the media, some 34% were on the radio in relation to Comhairle na nÓg and 41% were featured in newspaper articles (see Figure 20). In addition, 34% issued press releases in relation to their work, while a much smaller 9% used on-line sources (such as websites, blogs or social networks) to promote or inform about Comhairle na nÓg.
KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations specific to raising the profile of Comhairle na nÓg might therefore include:

- Ongoing correspondence should be maintained and relationships developed with schools, youth services and decision-makers in order to ensure a consistent and diverse profile for Comhairle na nÓg.

CASE STUDY

CORK CITY Comhairle na nÓg: The Cork Evening Echo attended and covered all three events that Cork City Comhairle held during 2009-2010. Three radio stations also announced the Comhairle’s ‘Summer Celebration’ event during their ‘Community’ slots. LIFE FM then conducted a 30-minute interview with two Comhairle members, who highlighted the past and previous work of Comhairle na nÓg and Dáil na nÓg, as well as members’ views and experiences of the issues that affect young people.

Another radio interview was held with a different Comhairle na nÓg member, who spoke about Comhairle na nÓg and the Mental Health Services Directory that Cork City Comhairle has been working on.

Verbal feedback from young people indicates that this use of media has greatly helped to highlight the profile of Comhairle na nÓg in Cork city.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations specific to raising the profile of Comhairle na nÓg might therefore include:

- Ongoing correspondence should be maintained and relationships developed with schools, youth services and decision-makers in order to ensure a consistent and diverse profile for Comhairle na nÓg.

Summary

Most Comhairli na nÓg have engaged with considerable success in a number of strategies to raise the profile of the Comhairle programme. Using a combination of ‘traditional’ media, such as radio and press, and web-based media has proved popular in promoting Comhairle and raising awareness of the issues being pursued by its members.
5. Work of the OMCYA’s Children and Young People’s Participation Support Team

The OMCYA’s Children and Young People’s Participation Support Team was established in 2009. Its purpose is to support the OMCYA’s participation projects, principally Comhairle na nÓg. All 32 Comhairlí have been assigned one of the 3 Participation Officers, who helps support their development and offers any necessary advice.

Support availed of from Participation Support Team

During 2009-2010, the most commonly availed of support from the Participation Officers was ‘general advice and support’, which most Comhairlí agreed was readily available. If Comhairlí organisers felt ‘unsure about anything’ or were ‘wondering about another way to do something’, they were very comfortable consulting the Participation Officers on such matters. Others found that the Participation Officers were a ‘good back-up’ and really helpful for ‘gauging progress’ because they offered a ‘national view’ or perspective. Many Comhairlí found the Participation Officers especially helpful in providing ‘guidance and insight on the development of steering committees’, while others felt that they improved the youth-led nature of Comhairle na nÓg. In addition, the provision of resources (such as handy document templates) was also highlighted as a significant benefit.

Examples of the specific types of support that Comhairlí have availed of from Participation Officers during the year are listed below:

- **Support on Comhairle structures**
  - guidance and insight on the development of a steering committee;
  - sits on the steering committee;
  - provided information on AGMs and seldom-heard young people;
  - advice on development of working structures and examples from other Comhairlí.
- **Practical support**
  - attendance at Comhairle meetings;
  - assistance with facilitation;
  - telephone support;
  - helped talk through plans and ideas;
  - advice on what works and what does not work;
  - information on the availability of resources;
  - promotion of Comhairle;
  - provides a national view;
  - sharing ideas from other Comhairlí;
  - providing resources;
  - filling out funding application forms;
  - funding and budgeting;
  - providing templates.

- **Training**
  - delegate training;
  - training of Comhairle members.

Each Comhairle na nÓg was also asked to rate the support they received from their Participation Officer. Figure 21 shows how some 66% found the support to be ‘very useful’, while a further 28% found the support ‘useful’. Only 6% of the Comhairlí had a negative response, finding the support provided ‘not useful’.

**Figure 21: Usefulness of support (%)**

- Not useful: 6%
- Useful: 28%
- Very useful: 66%

In addition to the very positive rating for the Participation Officers (94%), the majority of general comments from Comhairlí were most affirming, considering the Participation Officers as ‘very accessible’ and a ‘tremendous asset’. The overall conclusion was that the Participation Officers were certainly a benefit and had provided considerable support to the development of Comhairlí na nÓg in a variety of ways across the country.
Further support and/or training sought

The Comhairli were asked to outline what support and/or training they would like to receive in the future from the OMCYA’s Children and Young People’s Participation Support Team to help improve the effectiveness of Comhairle na nÓg. To that end, a number of suggestions were made under 3 main headings:

- **Support at national level**
  - Some Comhairli called for better coordination between different agencies in relation to Dáil na nÓg, whether that was between the OMCYA and other Government departments, or the OMCYA and the National Youth Council of Ireland.
  - Others sought further clarification on the precise funding criteria and expectations for the Comhairle programme.
  - There was also interest in having further resources, such as an on-line forum for Coordinators and Comhairle na nÓg members, as well as the provision of an induction pack for new youth councillors – and indeed, for adult councillors.
  - Other requests centred on the recent changes to the Comhairle calendar and child protection standards, with some Comhairli calling for assistance in the transition through the new calendar and with child protection policies.

- **Support at regional and local level**
  - The most popular request was for Network Training Days, which were considered very supportive and useful. Some Comhairli requested a continuation of the current model of delivery, albeit more frequently or for longer periods of time.
  - However, a greater number of Comhairli called for additional facilitated meetings to be held at regional level, which would enable further networking as well as the sharing of ideas and practice.

- **Training needs**
  - A number of suggestions were made on the type of training that would be of benefit, much of which centred on improved links with other stakeholders, such as schools, student councils, decision-makers and policy-makers.
  - Despite the current success of linking with seldom-heard young people, a number of Comhairli requested further training on how best to include this cohort.
  - Training on an array of practical skills was also requested, including information on social networks and how to use them to the advantage of Comhairle na nÓg; how to get the most from the steering committee was also a popular suggestion.
  - As many Comhairli become more focused on issues and policy change, any suggestions or training on how to keep the focus on policy change while keeping Comhairle na nÓg fun would also be welcomed.
It should be noted that all of these requests were made in the context that the current level of support would be maintained since the 'general advice and support' was considered extremely welcome and useful.

**KEY RECOMMENDATIONS**

Recommendations specific to the work of the OMCYA’s Children and Young People’s Participation Support Team might therefore include:
- The Participation Support Team should continue to support the development of each Comhairle na nÓg.
- The extensive list of further training and support sought by Comhairlí na nÓg should be carefully analysed and key areas prioritised and delivered on.
- Network Training Days should continue in some guise, either at national or regional level, or both.

**Summary**

While there have been calls for additional support at national and local level, as well as a number of training requests, the OMCYA’s Children and Young People’s Participation Support Team has been recognised by Comhairle members as a considerable and highly acclaimed support to the development of Comhairle na nÓg.
6. Impact of funding

This is now the third year of the Comhairle na nÓg Development Fund. During these three years, the Comhairle na nÓg programme has grown significantly and is also more streamlined and aligned to its core objectives and delivering on its key aims. In addition, it is developing in a sustainable manner with the security that dedicated and ongoing funding gives to any programme. The main impact of the funding can be captured under the following headings:

- structural development and support mechanisms;
- programme development;
- impact and influence on local decisions affecting young people.

Structural development and support mechanisms

Comhairle na nÓg’s status as the key mechanism for children and young people to have their voices heard on matters that affect them at local level was cemented into the National Children’s Strategy (2000). In the 10 years since that strategy was initiated, the Comhairle na nÓg structure has been developed considerably and there are a wide variety of support mechanisms in place to assist the delivery of the programme. In addition, the majority of Comhairli are now identified as a priority action in some Local Authority plans or CDB strategies, which greatly helps to ensure that Comhairle na nÓg is a key area of work and the responsibility of at least one person or section of the Local Authority who can drive the process. Similarly, some 94% of Comhairli have now got steering committees, which were highly rated by Comhairle na nÓg organisers and which provide considerable support, direction and automatic links to decision-makers.

The OMCYA’s Children and Young People’s Participation Support Team is another key support for the development of Comhairle na nÓg. In the year since its inception (2009), many Comhairli have availed of considerable and various assistance from the team, whose support was also highly rated and appreciated. Additional training needs have been identified by Comhairli, not least the continuation of the national Information and Networking Days, which were seen as an essential component in the future of the programme for both support and continued learning.
Many structural elements of Comhairle na nÓg have also become more solidified. The membership profile is significantly more balanced than before, with a relatively good age balance, although there is still some work to be done to ensure the younger cohort (12-15 year-olds) are meaningfully included. On average, gender balance has been achieved, as well as the representation of seldom-heard young people at AGMs and on Comhairle na nÓg committees. A 2-year term of office is becoming increasingly standard, with some 84% of Comhairlí operating on that basis. A similarly large percentage (88%) also provide training and development for Comhairle members to better equip them for their role.

By and large, the Comhairle na nÓg Development Fund has resulted in a more systematic approach to the programme and one where the Comhairle structures are becoming increasingly embedded in the Local Authority and youth services systems, making the work of Comhairle na nÓg less dependent on any one ‘champion’.

Programme development

With these structures and supports more embedded in the system, it is possible to give more focus and time to the development of the Comhairle na nÓg programme itself. In many respects, the dedicated funding from the Comhairle na nÓg Development Fund allows the programme to grow in a secure fashion, which is now more focused on delivering the key objectives of the programme. Although it may seem like an obvious statement, the fact that almost every single Comhairle na nÓg is meeting on a regular basis makes it easier to develop the overall programme. In fact, over the past 3 years of funding (2007-2010), there has been a total shift away from the practice of staging Comhairle na nÓg as a one-off event. At least 72% of Comhairlí are meeting as often as once a month, while another 13% meet every 2 months. They also have a good physical presence in Local Authority and youth service buildings.

However, the real programme development is represented by the number of Comhairlí na nÓg that now operate a system whereby young people are facilitated to identify issues of importance to them, prioritise those issues and pursue those priorities in a bid to achieve a targeted outcome that would benefit young people. The examples in this report for 2009-2010 illustrate the myriad of issues that matter to young people, as well as the variety of ways of prioritising those issues before they are pursued. There are many examples where young people have achieved their targeted outcome and have had an impact on service provision, policies and other key decisions made by local decision-makers, with some of the projects resulting in the production of practical resources of relevance for young people.

While this is obviously the key objective of Comhairle na nÓg – ensuring young people have a voice on matters that affect them – it was not always the case that the Comhairli focused on this element of the programme. Thus, the fact that increasingly more Comhairli now identify some issue, or issues, to be pursued with a view to achieving an outcome that will positively benefit young people is welcomed progress. The programme is also developed to the extent that Comhairle na nÓg members can support other youth participation structures, such as the CYPF, Dáil na nÓg, Jigsaw, Headstrong and student councils, as well as being involved in a host of other activities.
Impact and influence on local decisions affecting young people

It is evident from the submissions received (from Comhairlí, CDBs and other stakeholders) for the year 2009-2010 that Comhairle na nÓg is increasingly seen as the voice of young people or the consultative forum for young people, and decision-makers are more aware of the Comhairle na nÓg programme. A multiplicity of agencies consulted with and presented to Comhairlí na nÓg in a bid to get their feedback and advice on a variety of services, policies and key local issues. Almost half of Comhairlí now have young people represented on decision-making bodies, including their own steering committees of which 79% have youth representation. The main role of the Comhairle na nÓg members is to bring the voice of young people to the table and advise from a youth perspective. There were also a number of examples where Comhairlí made submissions on various local strategic or environmental plans.

Some members of Comhairlí also engage with a variety of decision-makers on an ongoing basis, as well as providing regular updates and presentations to CDBs on the issues that matter to them and which they have prioritised as important. It is vital that young people have this opportunity – of bringing their own ideas and issues of importance to the decision-makers – so that they have the possibility of setting the agenda, as well as reacting to an existing one.

Young people are well-briefed and supported by adult staff to participate on these bodies and influence them in a meaningful way. They are also supported to engage with print media, radio and social networking sites to further promote their ideas and increase the likelihood of impacting and influencing local decisions that affect young people.

The extent of the impact and influence of Comhairle na nÓg is always difficult to measure. There are many instances where the outcomes are intangible and difficult to quantify, such as the impact of being represented on a particular body. However, the reality is that when young people are well-briefed and supported, as they are, they are in as much a position to influence decisions and have an impact as their adult counterparts. When asked to rate their own influence, Comhairle na nÓg organisers felt that Comhairle na nÓg was either ‘very influential’ (61%) or ‘somewhat influential’ (32%) on the changes achieved on the issues being worked on – which means that only 7% thought that Comhairle na nÓg had no influence at all.

When one reflects on the number of issues worked on by various Comhairlí, the progress made on these issues and the fact that so many young people are now sitting on agencies and bodies that do make important local decisions, one cannot but conclude that Comhairle na nÓg does have a level of impact and influence on local decisions that affect young people. Indeed, in a number of instances, young people are directly involved in policy-making and informing services. This is not to say that there is not room for considerable improvement in hearing and heeding the voice of young people to increase this impact and influence. Similarly, there is also room for improvement in the structural development and support mechanisms of Comhairle, as well as programme development, which will better enable young people to have increased impact and influence.
Conclusions

This evaluation report indicates that there is considerable development and progress being made under the Comhairle na nÓg Development Fund. The grant scheme has essentially led to a more solidified structure and working arrangements, which have facilitated a renewed focus on the delivery of the key objectives of Comhairle na nÓg and the actual work programme of identifying and pursuing issues of importance to young people. There has also been an increase in the number of support mechanisms put in place. In accordance with the National Children’s Strategy (2000), which identifies Comhairle na nÓg as the key mechanism to ensure young people have their voices heard on issues of importance to them at local level, there are a number of supportive local policies and strategies in place that help contextualise and prioritise Comhairle na nÓg as a key area of work. In addition, Comhairle steering committees have become the norm and many of the significant improvements are in no small part due to the work of the OMCYA's Children and Young People’s Participation Support Team over the course of just one year (2009-2010).

Although it is difficult to measure the precise impact of Comhairle na nÓg, it is evident from the reported information that there is an increased understanding of the importance of affording young people the opportunity to influence and impact on decisions, policies and services of relevance to them. This understanding has translated into action and achievements in many locations, not least through more formal and regular contact with CDB agencies, local county/city councils and other youth participation structures. Moreover, Comhairle na nÓg is increasingly seen as the consultative ‘voice of youth’ for many local decision-makers and young people are represented on a number of agencies in almost half of all 32 Comhairlí na nÓg.

While there are as yet a number of Comhairlí that remain off track and will need additional assistance to keep pace with their Comhairle na nÓg colleagues, there are many that have made significant strides and enormous progress in this past year alone, as well as those who have developed at pace over a longer period and those that have always thrived. Clearly, the ambition must be that all Comhairle na nÓg members have this opportunity to thrive, independent of their location. However, although a number of challenges remain, it is clear that the funding has resulted in a programme that is more structurally robust, gradually embedding itself in the Local Authority system and becoming less dependent on individual champions.
Challenges

The ultimate challenge for Comhairle na nÓg is most likely going to be maintaining the levels of financial support that have been afforded to the programme over the last number of years. However, the reported Comhairle na nÓg budgets would indicate that, while other monies are allocated to each Comhairle, most Comhairlí are almost entirely dependent on the OMCYA grant to run their organisation in the manner aspired to fulfil key objectives. In addition to the financial support, maintaining the resource-intensive support of the OMCYA’s Children and Young People’s Participation Support Team will also be critical to the continued development of the programme.

At this point, the majority of Comhairlí are on the right track, but still need considerable support and guidance. In addition, there are some that need a significant helping hand to get to the same stage as their counterparts.

There are some additional key areas that will perhaps always be a challenge and need continued focus, including:

Structural supports and support mechanisms
Maintaining Comhairle na nÓg as a key area of work for the Local Authorities is an important challenge. With pressure on resources and people to multi-task in different areas, it is vital that Comhairle na nÓg does not slip down the priority list. Mechanisms to make certain this does not happen include ensuring Comhairle na nÓg is prioritised as an action in an official strategy or plan, maintaining a functioning steering committee with a membership of key local decision-makers, and embedding Comhairle na nÓg into the Local Authority system so that it is not reliant on any one champion.

It will also be important to be vigilant about the Comhairle na nÓg membership profile to ensure that young people of all ages, genders and backgrounds are fairly represented. To this end, while the labelling of young people is not something that anyone aspires to, the challenge is to devise a sensitive mechanism to record the profile of Comhairle members nationwide so that the programme remains accessible to all young people.

Programme development
It is a challenge, but one that must be met, to ensure that young people are at the fore of Comhairle na nÓg and that the programme becomes and remains as youth-led as appropriate. One of the most important elements of Comhairle na nÓg being youth-led is that young people are facilitated and empowered to identify the issues that matter to them, both for the AGM and at committee stage.

For many Comhairlí, it also seems a challenge to afford sufficient time to conducting whatever work and research is necessary on these issues to progress them sufficiently to influence positive change that benefits young people. The young people will likely need adult support and training to conduct surveys, research and whatever else is needed to properly engage with and pursue the issues chosen.
Impact and influence

Continued and ongoing effort to develop and maintain relationships with decision-makers is another key challenge that needs to be met. Whether these relationships are formal or informal, ongoing or on a needs-only basis, the more established links that exist, the more embedded Comhairle na nÓg will become as a key consultative forum for young people and the more influence Comhairle na nÓg will be able to exert when attempting to achieve change for young people.

Young people are certainly being well-briefed, supported and facilitated by the adult staff that oversee Comhairle na nÓg. The challenge now is to maintain the finance to continue this support and ensure that the Comhairlí are youth-led and focused on targeted outcomes identified by young people so that the programme has the opportunity to bring its influence and impact to the next level in all locations.

Key recommendations specific to 2009-2010 evaluation report

A number of recommendations specific to different areas of the Comhairle na nÓg programme have been made throughout this report. Some of these recommendations need to be considered and potentially executed by the OMCYA and its Participation Support Team, while others need to be executed at local level. The recommendations pertaining to national and local level are summarised in Table 8.
Table 8: Summary of key recommendations for Comhairle na nÓg

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>KEY RECOMMENDATIONS</th>
<th>AGENCY RESPONSIBLE</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>NATIONAL LEVEL</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Work programme (see Chapter 3)</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• A sensitive system that avoids labelling young people, but that allows for some profiling of Comhairle AGM participants, should be devised.</td>
<td>OMCYA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Further research needs to be conducted on what makes meetings youth-friendly and accessible to young people, and how agencies can be encouraged to provide these conditions.</td>
<td>OMCYA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Further research should also be done on how young people can be most effective and have most impact on adult committees where decisions are made.</td>
<td>OMCYA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• A sensitive mechanism to record the profile of Comhairle members without labelling young people (e.g. as ‘seldom-heard’) needs to be devised.</td>
<td>OMCYA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Children and Young People’s Participation Support Team (see Chapter 5)</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The OMCYA’s Children and Young People’s Participation Support Team should continue to support the development of each Comhairle na nÓg.</td>
<td>Participation Support Team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The extensive list of further training and support sought by Comhairlí na nÓg should be carefully analysed and key areas prioritised and delivered on.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Network Training Days should continue in some guise, either at national or regional level, or both.</td>
<td>Participation Support Team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>LOCAL LEVEL</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Support structure (see Chapter 1)</strong></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Where a steering committee is still not in place, it should be implemented as soon as possible.</td>
<td>Local Authority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Where young people are not represented on the steering committee, they should be facilitated and supported to become committee members as soon as possible.</td>
<td>Comhairle Coordinator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Steering committee members should avail of any relevant training offered by the OMCYA’s Children and Young People’s Participation Support Team.</td>
<td>Comhairle Coordinator/Steering committee members</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Work programme (see Chapter 3)</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• A specific strategy to ensure gender, age and geographical balance, as well as representation from seldom-heard young people, needs to be devised for each AGM.</td>
<td>Comhairle Coordinator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The selection of issues for the AGM and the Comhairle na nÓg committee should be youth-led and not led by adults.</td>
<td>Comhairle Coordinator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The number and breadth of issues discussed at an AGM need to be prioritised and reduced before the Comhairle committee can begin their work and aim to make any meaningful progress on issues.</td>
<td>Comhairle Coordinator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Where an age imbalance persists, strategies to ensure the participation of young people from all age groups should be employed.</td>
<td>Comhairle Coordinator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• A targeted outcome on an issue may not necessarily be achieved after a given timeframe. Young people should be involved in the process to decide whether they want to continue pursuing the issue for a further period of time.</td>
<td>Comhairle Coordinator</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 8 (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Work arrangements (see Chapter 2)</th>
<th>Comhairle Coordinator</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Where age balance at the AGM is achieved but not on the Comhairle na nÓg committee, elections for the Comhairle committee should be structured to cater for age balance. This can be achieved by having age-specific working groups from where the young people are elected to the committee.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Capacity-building with young people, especially seldom-heard young people, is essential to ensure that they are able to participate meaningfully and benefit from the experience.</td>
<td>Comhairle Coordinator</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Raising profile (see Chapter 4)</th>
<th>Comhairle Coordinator</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Ongoing correspondence should be maintained and relationships developed with schools, youth services and decision-makers in order to ensure a consistent and diverse profile for Comhairle na nÓg.</td>
<td>Comhairle Coordinator</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Next steps

The next steps for Comhairle na nÓg essentially involve meeting the challenges outlined above and implementing some of the key recommendations (summarised in Table 8) to ensure the Comhairlí continue to develop successfully, progress and flourish as a key component of youth participation in Ireland. Key to that success will be:

- Maintaining the Comhairle na nÓg Development Fund to continue making grants to individual Comhairlí and financing the OMCYA’s Children and Young People’s Participation Support Team, which is critical to the development of each Comhairle na nÓg.
- Ensuring Comhairle na nÓg remains a key area of work in the structure and strategic plans of the Local Authorities.
- Ensuring Comhairle na nÓg is youth-led and, most importantly, that young people are facilitated to identify and prioritise the issues that matter to them.
- Developing the Comhairle work programme to allow young people to focus on those issues and conduct whatever work is necessary to achieve targeted outcomes.
- Maintaining and developing key links to decision-makers, including the key stakeholders on the Comhairle steering committee.
- Maintaining a balanced membership profile, which will best be facilitated by continued relationship development with schools, youth services, organisations representing seldom-heard young people and other key stakeholders.