

**NYCI**  
**Organisational**  
**Policy on Youth**  
**Participation**

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## **Introduction:**

The issue of Youth participation is fundamental to NYCI's vision and mission where young people play a real and defined role in contributing to decisions that affect them. The consultations for NYCI's Strategic Plan clearly identified the participation of young people in decision making as a priority for the organisation and included specific guiding principles in the Plan to ensure that NYCI works towards the increased participation of young people within its democratic structures.

## **What is Youth Participation?**

There have been significant developments in recent times in the area of Youth Participation. Several initiatives such as the work on Second Level Student Councils, Dáil na nÓg, and the 'Young Voices' resource which all deal with the participation of young people, as well as learning from international developments, contribute to the current picture.

Goal 1 of the current Children's Strategy provides for:

- A bed-rock of legitimacy for hearing young voices;
- A means of ensuring that children and young people's rights to be heard remain on the public policy agenda;
- A foundation for the systematic development of opportunities for young voices to become structurally embedded in the democratic process.

NYCI is committed to promoting and supporting the development of mechanisms within NYCI and the voluntary youth sector to progress this strategy.

## **Vision:**

NYCI will ensure that young people have the opportunity to participate in the development of policies and strategies that affect them.

## **Mission:**

NYCI will support the establishment of mechanisms for young people to participate fully in the development of policies and strategies that affect them and will enable young people to have a say and be represented at all levels within the organisation. In addition, NYCI will promote and assist the development of youth participation initiatives within the organisation.

## **NYCI internal structures:**

The National Youth Council seeks to ensure a coordinated and holistic response to youth participation across all of its structures, including core work areas, national programmes, governance structures, working groups and sub-groups, and external relationships and representation opportunities.

## **Principles of Youth Participation:**

The National Youth Council is committed to supporting youth participation initiatives and structures in line with the following principles:

**Voluntary** - Youth participation must be, in essence, a voluntary arrangement, if it is to be of any value to the young people involved;

**Informed** - Young people should be made aware of what they are getting involved in and what their rights and responsibilities are;

**Relevant** - Young people should be able to input into the development of initiatives which should aim to address their needs and deal with relevant issues of importance to them;

**Enjoyable** - Young people need to have fun and feel valued, therefore, all youth participation initiatives, no matter how intense, need to be implemented in a way that is enjoyable;

**Developmental** - Young people should be given the opportunity to explore issues relating to the society in which they live and be empowered to become active citizens;

**Educational** - Youth participation projects should provide young people with opportunities for learning in both formal and informal settings;

**Supported** - Youth participation initiatives and activities should be supported, as appropriate, whether that involves training, advice, or guidance;

**Resourced** - Activities and initiatives also need to be adequately resourced in terms of staff support, access to information, funding, time span and space to carry out activities;

**Valued** - Young people should feel that they are valued and are being taken seriously, as is their work, in order to avoid tokenism;

**Owned** - Activities and initiatives should be youth led and young people involved should feel that they have ownership;

**Flexible** - In order to meet that changing needs of young people and allow for personal and other work obligations, there needs to be a certain amount of flexibility built into youth participation initiatives;

**Diverse** – It is important that all young people are afforded the opportunity to participate and that diversity in groups is not only respected, but sought after;

**Monitored and evaluated** – In order to ensure that initiatives are meeting the changing needs of the young people involved and to promote innovative youth participation activities, it is vital that all such initiatives and activities are monitored and evaluated on an ongoing basis;

**Researched** – NYCI is committed to securing funding to ensure that resources are available to conduct research into youth issues and that any process will directly involve young people.

**Implementation of recommendations:**

NYCI is committed to the following:

- Support the working group on youth participation in developing youth participation structures and opportunities within NYCI;
- Support NYCI internal structures to develop youth participation initiatives, programmes and activities in achieving the aims laid out in the strategic plan;
- Learn from current practice within member organisations to develop principles and guidelines for youth participation in the sector;
- Promote, advise on and evaluate the implementation of such principles and guidelines;
- Research and develop mechanisms to address the participation of ‘hard to reach’ young people and those experiencing various forms of disadvantage;
- Liaise and build relationships with other agencies and organisations in order to foster common policies and practices and to promote cooperation;
- Generate debate and discussion around developing best practice in youth participation.

## **1. Coordination and facilitation**

NYCI will promote the coordination of youth participation best practice and, where resources allow, will facilitate the creation of youth participation programmes and initiatives within NYCI.

It is envisaged the coordination and facilitation will, at times, require the Council to test or pilot particular initiatives or programmes. Thus, the National Youth Council will promote and support innovative youth participation initiatives.

## **2. Mechanisms for Youth Participation**

NYCI will seek to develop appropriate mechanisms for the participation of young people in all of its areas of work and governance. NYCI will seek to ensure the development of support structures, dependent on resources available, to ensure the maintenance and development of these participation mechanisms. NYCI will work with its partners and within existing provisions, such as the National Programmes, to ensure the development of mechanisms for contribution and participation. NYCI will regularly monitor and evaluate its performance in providing opportunities for the participation of young people and will develop appropriate steps to ensure that this happens. NYCI will also ensure that participation mechanisms are fully inclusive and will ensure that the mechanisms and structures put in place provide opportunities for all young people to participate.

### **3. Capacity building**

NYCI will ensure that it continues to work with Government agencies, other stakeholders and organisations to build the capacity of both the sector and youth organisations in terms of promoting participation of young people. Such capacity building may constitute the provision of information, training programmes, human resource development and the development of networks. It may also involve the accessing and commitment of financial resources to support capacity building.

### **4. Monitoring**

The National Youth Council acknowledges its role in monitoring internal youth participation programmes and initiatives and ongoing developments in the sector, in Ireland, and internationally. Furthermore, NYCI is committed to regularly reviewing its structures and practices to ensure the needs and interests of young people are addressed by these programmes/initiatives.

### **5. Advocacy**

As a consequence of its monitoring, research and policy work, the National Youth Council will continue to advocate on behalf of the youth sector and specific target groups, for relevant programmes, services and facilities. It shall also promote youth participation in decision-making and the governance of a wide range of government and member organisations. As part of this work, NYCI will continue to support national policy developments, particularly those that ensure a co-ordinated and holistic approach to the participation of young people in society and in all matters that affect them.



