Child and Youth Participation in Policy, Practice and Research

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5   Visible, valued and included

Prioritising youth participation in policy-making for the Irish LGBTI+ National Youth Strategy

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This chapter is dedicated to the memory of Tara's dad, Declan Killeen. Rest in power, Deco.

Abstract

This co-created chapter explores the involvement of the authors in the development of the Irish *LGBTI+ National Youth Strategy 2018-2020: LGBTI+ young people: visible, valued and included.* More specifically, it provides rich insights of two youth co-authors' experience of participating on the Youth Advisory Group for the Strategy. Their reflective commentary draws on previously undocumented learning and provides examples of the innovative initiatives which sought to ensure LGBTI+ youth were also visible, valued and included in the policy-making process. By placing LGBTI+ young people front and centre, the potential for holistic and lived experience to inform strategic planning was enhanced, reflecting the breadth and diversity of this experience. The development of the Strategy showcases the potential of creative policy-making processes underpinned by child-centred, rights-based approaches. While collaboration in policy-making with young people is essential, the complexities and challenges of participation highlight the need for consideration of the practicalities of implementing meaningful participatory processes. The importance of interpersonal and institutional allyship are discussed throughout the chapter, with the youth co-authors providing real-world examples. The chapter concludes with an appeal to strengthen dialogue and feedback, enhancing the influence of seldom-heard youth on policy-making. In this way, participation ensures policy-making speaks directly to young people's interests and concerns.

Keywords: LGBTI+ youth; participation; policy; allyship; influence; intergenerational learning

Introduction

In 2018, Ireland became the first country in the world to adopt a national youth strategy for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex (LGBTI+) young people. The *LGBTI+ National Youth Strategy 2018–2020: LGBTI+ Young People: Visible, Valued and Included* was published by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA, 2018). The *LGBTI+ National Youth Strategy*, hereafter referred to as the strategy, reflects the convergence of a commitment to LGBTI+ rights, alongside recognition of children and young people's right to be consulted in decisions that affect them. This is underpinned by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), ratified by Ireland in 1992, which informs Irish child policy (DCYA, 2014, 2015). The commitment to child-centred and rights-based participation coincided with the rapid recognition of LGBTI+ rights in Ireland, which were markedly improved in 2014 when the Irish government became a signatory to the Declaration of Intent on the International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia.[1] However, challenges in the delivery of policies and political commitments remain. While Lundy (2007) suggests that participation can provide an on-going incentive for young people to engage fully in major decisions about their lives, an audit to ascertain levels of youth participation found that LGBTI+ young people were less likely than others to be consulted on matters of policy (DCYA, 2011). Subsequent research confirmed that some young people are seldom heard, including LGBTI+ youth, which may result in a reluctance to participate (Kelleher et al., 2014). In response, the DCYA (2015) published the *National Strategy on Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-Making 2015–2020*. A toolkit was commissioned: *A Practical Guide to Including Seldom-Heard Children and Young People in Decision-Making*, which made specific reference to the inclusion and participation of LGBTI+ youth (McEvoy, 2015). Despite such initiatives, more recent research suggests that prejudice, stigma and discrimination continue to contribute to substantial vulnerabilities among LGBTI+ youth.[2] In response, the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs initiated the development of the strategy, with the appointment of an Independent Chair and Oversight Committee, comprising representation from the statutory and voluntary sectors and representatives from LGBTI+ organisations.[3]

The strategy provided a cross-governmental commitment to implementing measures to enhance the lives of LGBTI+ youth. It has three overarching goals: 1. Create a safe, supportive, inclusive environment; 2. Improve LGBTI+ youths' physical, mental and sexual health; and 3. Develop the research and data environment to better understand the lives of LGBTI+ young people.[4] The participation of young people throughout the policy-making process is illustrated in Figure 5.1.

The engagement of a Youth Advisory Group (YAG) was central to the strategic planning process (DCYA, 2018, p. 37). Through a national network across Ireland, 13 young LGBTI+ people and youth allies (who included members of Scouting Ireland, the National Youth Council Ireland and Comhairle na nÓg)[5] were recruited onto the YAG. A dedicated youth worker was assigned from *BeLong to Youth Services*, the national organisation supporting LGBTI+ young people. The youth worker provided a conduit between the YAG and the Oversight Committee and was a point of contact, facilitating liaison, coordination and day-to-day management of youth engagement.
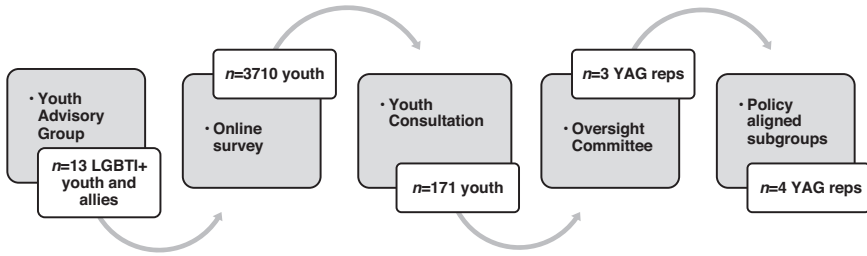
Figure 5.1 Prioritising youth participation in the development of the Irish LGBTI+ National Youth Strategy

Source: Authors own.

The authors of this chapter became involved in the development of the strategy in different ways. Tara Killeen and Ayrton Kelly were encouraged to apply to become members of the YAG by their youth workers. Working with the young people, Nerilee Ceatha was invited to sit on the Oversight Committee with her social work policy and practice background, alongside her research on LGBTI+ well-being. This chapter offers a reflective commentary from the two youth co-authors on their experience of being visible, valued and included in the participatory policy-making process.

Co-creating this chapter

The collaboration on the chapter was guided by the Lundy model of participation (2007). Initially, in-person and online brainstorming sessions were held to ensure that the youth co-authors' perspectives and priorities were paramount (Ceatha, 2020). The young people conducted peer-led interviews with each other. These recorded conversations were transcribed and reviewed by the youth co-authors, highlighting areas for further consideration. Recurring patterns and themes were identified iteratively through discussion, capturing the depth and breadth of their experiences on the YAG.

During this collaboration, a very personal, sad experience occurred when Tara's father, Deco Killeen, passed away, on 15 August 2020, following treatment for cancer. This devastating loss for Tara, and the process of reflecting on their relationship, has been integral to the journey of writing this chapter. The Irish writer Sebastian Barry commented: "The pride given to you by your gay child is unquantifiable" (Hayden, 2017). Deco was very proud of Tara, wearing rainbow bandanas during Pride month. In this way, parents/guardians can be important allies. Such reflections led to the importance of allyship in promoting the participation of young people who are seldom heard, including LGBTI+ youth.

Allyship

Recognition of age-based marginalisation is inherent in many policy areas, and fundamental to the UNCRC (Checkoway, 2011; Lundy, 2007). Checkoway identifies adult allies as instrumental to youth participation describing them as "bridging persons between youth and the adult world" (2011, p. 342). However, young LGBTI+ people experience intersecting forms of marginalisation as sexual and

gender minority youth, alongside other identities. While there is no consensus regarding the definition of an ally, Edwards (2006) uses the term 'Allies for Justice,' to describe interpersonal allyship and solidarity with marginalised communities. This focuses on: issues, not individuals; intersections of oppression; injustice causing harm; and the interconnectedness of humanity (2006). Russell and Bohan (2016) extend such forms of interpersonal and intergenerational allyship to encompass institutional allyship, predicated on values of social justice, equity, diversity and inclusion. They highlight the potential of institutional allyship in seeking structural and social change (Russell and Bohan, 2016).

The strategy calls for an Ireland where LGBTI+ youth will be *visible, valued and included* (DCYA, 2018, p. 14). The development and co-creation of its mission can be viewed as an exercise in embedding institutional allyship, consistent with Russell and Bohan (2016). The process of developing the strategy offered an opportunity for intergenerational learning which Newman and Hatton-Yeo (2008) suggest can be reciprocal and mutually beneficial.

Drawing on the concepts of being visible, valued and included, underpinned by allyship and intergenerational learning, the involvement and role of young people in the development of the strategy is discussed next.

Youth participation in developing the strategy

The strategy sought to ensure that young people's voices were "embedded at the heart" of the policy-making process, providing "critical insight" from a youth perspective (DCYA, 2018, p. 9). Throughout the process of writing this chapter, the youth co-authors reflected on the importance of participation in policy-making:

TARA: *I think is definitely important. If it is something that is affecting you and affecting your life, you should know about it. Not in depth, but you should know. For people that might have an interest there should be more resources to make policy more accessible.*

AYRTON: *I definitely think there needs to be more resourcing to engage young people in this way, if it's a structure that the Department and the government wants to go forward with. I do think it's valuable, particularly engaging young people in policy development. Personally, I'm very grateful for understanding policy development more and what young people should get from this type of experience.*

A residential weekend was pivotal to creating a safe and inclusive space for the young people to express their views (Lundy, 2007). Both young people spoke positively about how the residential weekend provided a supportive space and an opportunity for connection:

AYRTON: *One of the cornerstone moments of the whole experience was the residential weekend. When I think of that experience, specifically, I think there is value in bringing young people together and forming a strong and cohesive group.*

TARA: *I know, especially for me there was a lot of people that all knew each other, that was grand. I think if we didn't do that residential weekend they could have easily turned into a situation where they all know each other, so they're the ones who are going to speak. I don't know anybody so I'm not going to open my mouth. I think there was high quality to breaking the ice with each other*.

The residential weekend provided a forum for information sharing, crucial in facilitating young people's voices (McEvoy, 2015; Lundy, 2007). The development of the strategy was aligned to *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures: The National Policy Framework for Children and Young People 2014–2020*, referred to colloquially as BOB-F. This includes transformational goals and a commitment to "listen to and involve children and young people" (DCYA, 2014, p. 7). One of the highlights was the workshop on BOB-F, which introduced the young people to this national policy framework:

TARA: *I didn't know what BOB-F was, even though it impacted my life and things around me, like teachers and youth workers following BOB-F . . . I really liked the fact that the subgroups were split into the BOB-F outcomes. It gave me an understanding of what we were working towards and helped to clarify the goals for the Strategy as a whole. I never really had an introduction to policy before, even on a beginner's level, so it was cool to watch that process*.

The youth co-authors' insights and reflections are now described and analysed regarding their experience of being visible, valued and included in the strategic development process.

Visible

Visibility is most immediately manifest in the recognition of various groups identified in the nomenclature of the strategy. The use of the acronym LGBTI+ developed iteratively during the formation of the strategy (2018). While' LGBTI+' refers to those self-identifying as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex, this is an umbrella term and encompasses three aspects: sexual orientation, gender identity and diverse sex development (Lee et al., 2016). However, it is not limited to these forms of self-identification and also extends to, amongst others, those identifying as questioning, queer, asexual and non-binary. LGBTI+ youth, in particular, have diverse forms of self-identification and self-descriptors (Ceatha et al., 2020).

The young people highlighted the complex issues that can arise in policy development in relation to LGBTI+ identities and inclusions:

TARA: *I suppose [I achieved] visibility from the report launch or speaking out and I was part of the Youth Advisory Group and subgroup. So, I think we were definitely visible as young people. . . . But you can't just have one letter of the acronym, and say, like: "oh, we have a gap" – it has to be more diverse than just having one from each kind of letter*.

AYRTON: *It would be ideal if it could be a perfectly balanced thing. That's difficult when gender and sexuality is so fluid . . . I'm not sure if they could look back and say "On our Youth Advisory Group were X [number of] males" – they actually didn't know the composition of sexual orientations or genders.*

The young people were acutely aware of the varying degrees of LGBTI+ visibility on the YAG, and whether this fully represented LGBTI+ diversity. This is consistent with Formby (2017), who highlighted the diversity 'within and between' those who identify as LGBT. In Ireland, parental consent is required for those under 18 to participate in fora such as the YAG. Had the recruitment of young people focused solely on youth who self-identify as LGBTI+, rather than involvement in LGBTI+ and other youth organisations, those who were unsure, questioning or not 'out' to their parents/guardians may have been unintentionally excluded. While parents/guardians have a pivotal role, as allies, in facilitating and promoting participation, these complexities are specific to LGBTI+ youth identities and inclusions (Taylor, 2008).

The young people on the YAG became increasingly aware of such dilemmas during the development of the strategy in relation to wider youth participation– for example, during discussions about participation for the online survey (*n*= 3710) and the youth consultations (*n*= 171). These nationwide consultations took place in seven locations: Dublin (2); Sligo (1); Galway (1); Cork (1); Waterford (1); and Dundalk (1) (DCYA, 2018). While opinion was divided amongst the YAG about opening consultations to non-LGBTI+ young people, it was agreed that these events should be as open, accessible and inclusive as possible. On reflection, both youth co-authors felt this ensured all youth felt welcome to participate. Composition included: young people who were comfortable openly identifying as LGBTI+, youth allies, children of LGBTI+ parents/guardians, and young people who, at that time, may not have been definitive about their sexual orientation or gender identities.

Further, visibility may have particular resonance for LGBTI+ youth and promote opportunities for intergenerational learning (Newman and Hatton-Yeo, 2008). An example was highlighted during the peer interviews:

TARA: *Something that was good about it was the interaction with more LGBTI+ young people and the feedback from older LGBTI+ people. There was something nice about being in a room and everybody being in the same community and having similar understandings of what we wanted to get out of this and having a similar goal. I really enjoyed it because, not only was it a learning experience, but it was intergenerational. I'm a lesbian who was 17–18 at the time and there were older women that were also lesbian. It was nice to have that kind of perspective and the whole thing of intergenerational lesbians working together towards the same goal. It was a really positive experience for me. Beforehand, I didn't know any older LGBTI+ people, so it was really cool to get the perspective and experience of older lesbians. That kind of representation – older, and has a great job, and is doing well in life – that's pretty cool.*

Such forms of LGBTI+ visibility may have unintended positive consequences, offering seldom heard youth the potential to envision future possible selves and providing an incentive for participation (Kelleher et al., 2014).

Valued

Promoting youth participation requires recognition and valuing of the diverse lived experiences of seldom heard young people, such as LGBTI+ youth (Kelleher et al., 2014). This was regarded as essential in addressing the stark gaps in knowledge and gaining a better understanding of their lives (DCYA, 2018, p. 13). An example of the value placed on youth participation can be seen with the involvement of YAG members as part of the subgroups aligned to BOB-F. In order to embed parity, it was important that the YAG members had access to the same documentation, alongside others in the subgroup, to ensure fully informed decision-making. This reflects the basic requirement for information in order for young people to realise their rights under UNCRC (Lundy, 2007). Tara's experience speaks to the importance of intergenerational allyship in reworking processes with people who "were on my side":

TARA: *When I finally got the draft documents, they were ten centimetres thick with a confidential watermark and a note which said: 'Do not show this to anyone'. The other subgroup members kind of fought for me to get the documents that they had and I was just turning up to the meetings and being a bit like, "I don't know what you guys are talking about – let me read". That was not wasting time, but it was taking time. So, yeah, it was nice to have that mutual understanding with them and to know that they were on my side.*

This exemplifies Checkoway's (2011) concept of the role of adult allies as "bridging persons" and further highlights the value placed on YAG member involvement in the subgroup. Subgroup meetings meant that members could actively seek Tara's views and refer to her for clarification. Such intergenerational allyship valued Tara's engagement, attendance and participation, on her terms:

TARA: *The first couple of times that we met, and you know, it's a nice building . . . I was comfortable, but I was also like "Oh god, this is an office – there's people walking around in fancy clothes and very middle-class kind of people – just the opposite of me." . . . I don't know if I recognised it at the time, but looking back I was definitely more reserved – more, I don't know, not uptight – but sitting still, telling myself 'act normal' . . . And I offered to ask my Youth Centre, so I suppose for me it was nice to take a bit of responsibility, in a leadership role, and organise that. And I think it was important as well for the others on the subgroup. So, it was nice to have the meetings in the Youth Centre and it was nice to be in a familiar setting . . . I think having people in your space and the atmosphere of the space definitely affects how you contribute.*

While recognising that it could be daunting to be the only young person in the pressurised environments of committees and professional discourses, it is unclear whether this was addressed across all subgroups. This underscores both the potential of institutional allyship, and the investment required, to embed this in all policy-making processes. Such investment values youth participation and recognises the opportunity for reciprocal, mutually beneficial intergenerational learning, consistent with Newman and Hatton-Yeo (2008). This was echoed by the Independent Chair:

> The report talks about the need to bridge the gap between older and younger LGBTI+ people. This is often framed in terms of young people learning from their elders, knowing their history and understanding the context of their rights and culture. But, in working on this Strategy, the opposite has been true for me. It has been a process, not of imparting information to younger people, but of learning from them.
>
> (*Mullally, 2017*)

In this way, placing value on youth participation aligns with Edwards' (2006) emphasis on allyship that is mutually beneficial through recognition of the interconnectedness of humanity.

Included

By placing YAG members front and centre, the potential for the diversity of their expertise-by-experience to inform strategic planning was enhanced. Such forms of institutional allyship, outlined by Russell and Bohan (2016), were reflected in the inclusion of YAG members in terms of representation, consultation, presentations and media coverage, as illustrated in Figure 5.2.

The inclusion of YAG members was pivotal in promoting the development of the strategy as described by Ayrton:

AYRTON: *Even amongst LGBTI+ communities, sharing the videos about what was going on and sharing the survey links and engaging with young people at the consultations was part of the Youth Advisory Group.*

Ensuring inclusive participation may be particularly beneficial for seldom heard young people, as Tara noted:

TARA: *It was better than I expected, in a sense, because being a young person, when you're involved in certain things, it's like: 'Yeah, you can be involved – oh, we just need you to fill out a survey'. I mean we were involved much more than I thought we would be, and in all the decision-making processes. I wasn't expecting to be and was really happy that I was given the opportunity. . . . It showed me the importance of having young people involved.*
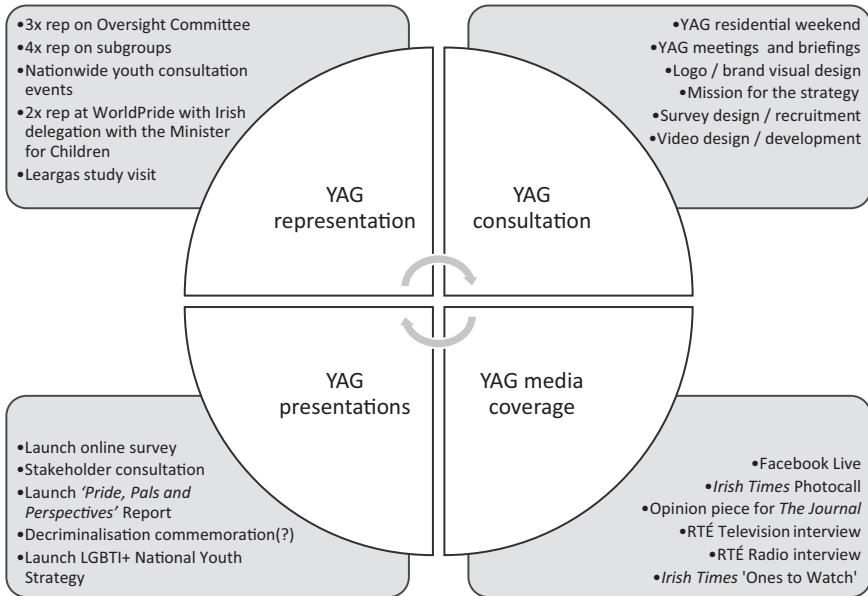
- •3x rep on Oversight Committee
- •4x rep on subgroups
- •Nationwide youth consultation events
- •2x rep at WorldPride with Irish delegation with the Minister for Children
- •Leargas study visit

YAG representation

- •YAG residential weekend
- •YAG meetings and briefings
- •Logo / brand visual design
- •Mission for the strategy
- •Survey design / recruitment
- •Video design / development

YAG consultation

YAG presentations

YAG media coverage

- •Launch online survey
- •Stakeholder consultation
- •Launch *'Pride, Pals and Perspectives'* Report
- •Decriminalisation commemoration(?)
- •Launch LGBTI+ National Youth Strategy

- •Facebook Live
- •*Irish Times* Photocall
- •Opinion piece for *The Journal*
- •RTÉ Television interview
- •RTÉ Radio interview
- •*Irish Times* 'Ones to Watch'

Figure 5.2 Youth Advisory Group (YAG) members – visible, valued and included – throughout the development of the Irish LGBTI+ National Youth Strategy

Source: Authors own.

The importance placed on the contribution of YAG members was acknowledged by the Independent Chair, in the foreword to the strategy:

> *I would like to commend the great work done by all of the young people who assisted with the development of this Strategy. Across the national consultation events, and within the Youth Advisory Group, which worked with and parallel to the Oversight Committee, their insights, enthusiasm and perspectives were invaluable. I feel proud to be part of a Government Strategy that has been developed with young people for young people. I think I speak for everyone who worked on this Strategy, when I say that the close participation of young people taught us all lessons in respect, collaboration and inclusion,*

(DCYA, 2018: vii)

While the youth co-authors appreciated that their involvement was not tokenistic, they expressed concerns in relation to broader concepts of inclusion. In reflecting on their experiences, they highlighted shortcomings regarding ethnic and cultural diversity and the rural-urban divide, raising issues regarding inclusion. The homogeneity of the YAG was noted, as was their feeling that they could not 'speak for'

diverse perspectives. They discussed their awareness that sexual orientation, gender identity and diverse sex development are only an aspect of identity:

TARA: *My biggest thing would be that there were no black people or people of colour on the Youth Advisory Group and it was a very white panel. I think we could have got a lot more out of it if there were other races, other ethnicities, other cultures. In a sense LGBTI+ people, relative to everyone else, are quite a diverse cohort, but when you only have LGBTI+ people, you also need to make sure that group is diverse too. The lack of diversity, I feel, was something that was very easy to resolve.*

AYRTON: *In hindsight, demographic data would have highlighted that there was an issue with diversity. Which is ironic because you think as a minority group it's automatically counted, but you do actually have to take care to make sure it is diverse.*

These insights attest to the youth co-authors' interpersonal allyship with other marginalised communities, as evidenced elsewhere (Edwards, 2006). It underscores the importance of attending to diversity to ensure meaningful inclusion, particularly for seldom heard youth with intersecting identities. Geographical limitations on inclusion were also noted, with those from rural areas having to 'speak a bit louder':

AYRTON: *The Youth Advisory Group had very low rural representation, . . . I was kind of a rural-urban voice, because I lived in Dublin and was representing Donegal youth. That in itself is interesting because it was the only way I could have been as involved as I was . . . I think in a sense geography excludes so many individuals. I'm very lucky to go to a university in Dublin, but not everyone, and certainly not every LGBTI+ person does. So, it excludes a lot of people from the process . . . I feel like I had to, sometimes, speak a bit louder, like a kind of overcompensation.*

These examples underscore the complexity in ensuring inclusive, participatory policy-making, particularly with intersecting forms of marginalisation. It may be particularly important to address dilemmas posed regarding the practicalities of inclusive participation and representation:

AYRTON: *I'm still uncertain about what perspective I was expected to bring to the table. I can't help but wonder if I should have been more myself, or less myself, and more of a 'representative voice'. The conflicting perspectives, which I felt responsible for representing, was a challenge.*

This emphasises the need to clarify the boundaries and expectations of participation, alongside acknowledgement that representations will always be partial. For seldom heard youth, including LGBTI+ young people, this is essential to ensure participation does not become burdensome and inadvertently create additional pressure regarding representation.

In reflecting on their experiences, the youth co-authors expressed self-doubt and questioned their impact on the strategy:

AYRTON: *Did we have more influence than we think we did? There's no way of quantifying the impact we had. I do think it's valuable, particularly engaging young people in policy development. I think if that was our only purpose, it actually did a good thing. . . . If that was the role, it would have sufficed in a sense, but it was self-defining, so we didn't really know what the parameters, what the boundary of our role was.*

TARA: *I don't know about individually valued, generally it could have been any 18-year-old lesbian, that was there – it wasn't necessarily me was important. It could have been any young person.*

It is crucial that inclusion ensures young people are made aware that they brought something unique to their role. It highlights the necessity of feedback to young people on how their views influenced decisions and decision-making. Such feedback is a critically important element of participation work in relation to youth influence (Lundy, 2018).

Discussion

Allyship was identified as a central theme throughout the dyadic reflections and collaborative discussions of the youth co-authors (Russell and Bohan, 2016; Edwards, 2006). Across the development of the strategy allyship was manifest through LGBTI+ youth as allies to their peers, including those who were less visible; LGBTI+ youth as allies to their non-LGBTI+ peers; parents/guardians as allies in facilitating youth participation; practitioners as allies in youth engagement; LGBTI+ communities as intergenerational allies; and policy-makers and professionals as allies in reorienting participatory strategic planning processes. As such, allyship requires a collective commitment and investment by a range of adults as "bridging persons" (Checkoway, 2011). This chapter concurs with Russell and Bohan (2016) and echoes the need to move beyond interpersonal allyship and embed institutional allyship. Further, it is argued that institutional allyship is a necessary pre-requisite in ensuring LGBTI+ young people are visible, valued and included. This may provide an on-going incentive for the participation, engagement and involvement of seldom heard youth, including LGBTI+ young people. While the investment required to embed institutional allyship across policy-making processes is acknowledged, such investment will strengthen opportunities for mutually beneficial, reciprocal and intergenerational learning (Russell and Bohan, 2016; Newman and Hatton-Yeo, 2008; Edwards, 2006).

Lundy (2018) highlights influence as the area of Article 12 of UNCRC requiring the greatest attention. In particular, dialogue and feedback – full, accessible, timely and followed up – are emphasised as the most meaningful aspect of rights-based participation in decision-making (2018, p. 349). Such dialogue and feedback, which acknowledges individual and collective contributions, is essential in embedding institutional allyship within policy-making processes. This may have

heightened importance for seldom heard youth in reinforcing that their participation matters (Kelleher et al., 2014). This suggests that reflection on, and evaluation of, participatory structures and processes is crucial to ensure the influence of these seldom heard diverse young voices.

Conclusion

The development of the LGBTI+ National Youth Strategy showcases an innovative initiative and exemplifies the potential of creative participatory policy-making structures and processes. Recognition of Irish leadership and support of LGBTI+ communities culminated in the presentation of a Luminary Award at World Pride. This chapter highlights institutional allyship as a necessary pre-requisite in promoting the engagement and involvement of seldom heard youth, such as LGBTI+ young people. It concludes with an appeal to develop ways to ensure the influence of young people on policy decisions and decision-making. It is suggested that this may increase the interest of seldom heard youth in policy-making and lend credibility to strategic planning processes, ensuring that policy speaks directly to young people's interests and concerns.

Notes

1 The Declaration of Intent on the International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia informed legislative and policy measures, including a referendum and subsequent changes to the Irish constitution to provide for marriage equality; legislation on gender recognition for adults; and a review, with recommendations, on the provision of gender-affirming care for those under 18.
2 The *LGBTIreland Report* found that LGBTI+ youth experienced twice the level of self-harm, three times the level of attempted suicide and four times the level of severe/extremely severe stress, anxiety or depression.
3 The Irish Government News Service press release issued on 25 June 2016, stated: "The *LGBTIreland Report* published recently identified barriers to good mental health. . . . The report shows higher levels of self-harm and suicidal behaviour among LGBTI+ teenagers. . . . As a Government we must respond."
4 Strategic development included an environmental scan of the national and international LGBTI+ related research; a nationwide youth consultation; an online survey; and stakeholder consultation and submissions.
5 Comhairle na nÓg are child and youth councils within 31 local authorities across Ireland. They provide opportunities for young people to be involved in the development of local services and policies.

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Author biographies

Nerilee Ceatha is a SPHeRE PhD scholar at University College Dublin exploring the protective factors that promote LGBTI+ youth wellbeing. She was invited to sit on the Oversight Committee for the *LGBTI+ National Youth Strategy* and lead on the subgroup *'Safe and protected from harm'*. Nerilee was presented with The Eadbhard O'Callaghan Award for Excellence in Youth Mental Health Research in 2021.

Ayrton Kelly graduated with a BComm (International) and recently completed a Postgraduate Diploma at University College Dublin (Design Thinking for Sustainability). He was member of the Youth Advisory Group (YAG) and Oversight Committee and represented the YAG on the subgroup '*Connected, respected and contributing to their world'*. Ayrton spoke at the stakeholder consultation and was MC for the *Strategy* launch. Ayrton was part of the Irish delegation to World Pride in 2019. He has a particular interest in children's rights, youth participation, innovation and policy-making.

Tara Killeen is studying for a BSocSci (Youth and Community Work) at Maynooth University. She was a Youth Advisory Group (YAG) member for the *Strategy* and YAG representative on the subgroup *'Safe and protected from harm'*. She spoke at the report launch of *'Pride, Pals and Perspectives.'* Tara was part of the Irish delegation for World Pride in 2019.

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