

2007 – 2010

Ombudsman for Children's Office
Strategic Plan 2007-2010

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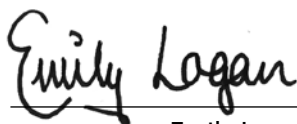
Foreword

This is my first statement of strategy as Ireland's first Ombudsman for Children. Setting up the Office has been a significant piece of organisational development. Having commenced my post in April 2004, it took until April 2005 to have a full team and to truly say that the Office was operational.

Despite the enormous expectations of the Office, it was important to give particular consideration to establishing an organisation with the appropriate values, culture, management systems and staff profiles which will serve the Office well for the long-term. It has often been said that a working culture is engrained at a very early stage. In this respect, considerable effort was invested in establishing a culture of independence, of commitment and hard work for the interests of children and young people.

A substantial amount of time was invested in developing an understanding of existing national stakeholders and work dedicated to children's interests and the safeguarding of children's rights. In developing our strategy it is important that our Office acknowledges the work of existing agencies and seek, within the confines of our purpose and role, to augment rather than duplicate existing work being carried out on behalf of children and young people.

I believe that this is the right time to produce a statement of strategy, when myself and my team have an informed, strong sense of direction and a clear vision of what it is we need to prioritise for 2007 – 2010.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Emily Logan". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style. Below the signature is a thin horizontal line.

Emily Logan
Ombudsman for Children

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1. Introduction

The Ombudsman for Children's Office (OCO) in Ireland was established in primary legislation: the Ombudsman for Children Act, 2002. The Ombudsman for Children Act, 2002 was commenced in its entirety on 25 April 2004. By April 2005, the full complement of staff had been recruited and the Office submitted its first annual report to the Oireachtas. At the end of 2007 the OCO employed 15 staff and will develop incrementally over the period of strategy in line with its work.

The establishment of an Ombudsman for Children's Office in Ireland is one of a growing number of international offices that share a common purpose: to promote and safeguard the rights of children and young people. When Norway was the first country to appoint an Ombudsman for Children in 1981, the office was viewed singularly as an independent complaints handler. Since the adoption of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) in 1989, legislation across Europe has clearly positioned Ombudsmen for Children not only as complaints handlers but also advocates for children's rights.

The United Nations considers that Specialised Institutions, such as the Ombudsman for Children in Ireland, are National Human Rights Institutions. As such, the UN Principles Relating to the Status and Functioning of National Institutions for the Protection and Promotion of Human Rights apply to the workings of this office. The Principles, known as the Paris Principles, lay down important markers for the functioning of human rights institutions including guarantees of independence and the vesting of adequate competences and responsibilities in the mandates of such institutions. The Ombudsman for Children's Office will work to ensure that its mandate complies with the Paris Principles.

The Ombudsman for Children's Office is a member of the European Network of Ombudsmen for Children (ENOC) and the British and Irish Network of Ombudsmen and Children's Commissioners (BINOCC).

The functions of the Ombudsman for Children are:

- to provide an independent complaints handling service regarding actions by public bodies;
- to promote children's rights, including through participation and communication activities; and
- to conduct research and policy monitoring and provide advice to Government.

The Ombudsman for Children's Office is independent of Government and other civil society actors. The Ombudsman is directly accountable to the Oireachtas.

This is the OCO's strategic plan for 2007 – 2010 setting out the direction and priorities for its work. The strategic plan contains:

- an outline of OCO's mission, mandate, and value base;
- a description of our vision; and
- a summary of the strategic issues and priorities for OCO.

The strategic plan will be used as a management framework for the OCO, as a basis for annual business plans. Progress will be reviewed annually and the plan updated in the light of emerging developments.

The OCO intends the strategy will provide:

- a guide to decisions and actions, so that all resources and energy are aligned with strategic goals through operational planning and individual objective setting;
- a statement of mission which allows OCO to position itself relative to other stakeholders in its operational environment and differentiate itself and its role in a way that complements existing work to Irish society;
- a basis for evaluating impact and performance at organisational and individual levels.

2. Mission Statement

The OCO's mission is to be an independent voice and catalyst for change on behalf of all children and young people in Ireland, to promote their rights and best interests and to promote a shared responsibility for developing a society where children and young people are better respected.

The outworking of the mission statement in the OCO is set out in the paragraphs below which illustrate the three levels at which the OCO works and the key activities at each level.

At the core of the strategy is the aim of having children and young people's rights respected, free from discrimination, treated in their best interests so that they are able to fully participate in society. The OCO is uniquely placed to work at a strategic and meta level, i.e. at Government level to shape and influence the development of Irish Society and attitudes. By influencing policy and legislation through research and knowledge from sources as broad ranging as international best practice through to young people themselves - whose participation in society the OCO directly seeks to foster right through to an individual child or young person's situation illuminated through complaints investigation.

The OCO works at a macro level to encourage organisations, communities and institutions to increase children and young people's participation in planning and decision making. Finally, the OCO focuses at the micro level to achieve justice and fairness for individual children and young people through investigations and by responding to their complaints.

3. Authority and Mandate

The OCO derives its authority to act from three main sources:

1. The statutory mandate of the OCO is set out in the Ombudsman for Children Act, 2002.
2. The OCO seeks a mandate from children and young people to work on their behalf on issues that are important to them.
3. The OCO will also look to the UN's Paris Principles on National Human Rights Institutions, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, and the work of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child in defining, shaping and exercising its mandate.

Many Ombudsman for Children offices use the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child as a living strategic tool in guiding their work. For this Office the UNCRC will be used as a benchmark against which Ireland's progress on children's rights will be monitored nationally.

Through each of our main functions we will encourage public bodies, schools and voluntary hospitals to develop practice, policy and procedures that uphold the rights of children. The formal reporting responsibilities will continue to be an important tool in assisting the OCO to achieve its mission and the concluding observations of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child will inform our strategy.

4. Values

These are the values which underpin how the OCO conducts its role and relationships, externally and internally, as well as informing decision making, performance goals and staff development.

1. Acting in the best interests of children.
2. Striving for justice and fairness for children.
3. Integrity and honesty.
4. Participation and capacity building.
5. Open and outward looking.
6. Professional and results focused.
7. Teamwork and respect.

5. Vision

The strategic plan is based on achieving a vision for the future, where:

- The Ombudsman for Children's Office uses its uniquely independent position and powers to have maximum positive impact on children and young people's lives.
- The OCO is not only ensuring that children and young people's rights are realised but that their place in Irish society is valued and respected.
- The OCO stays in touch with the realities of children and young people's lives and brings that reality to Government, legislators, opinion makers and wider society through direct contact, the evidence of research, investigation and policy recommendations. It has a regional presence and offers its services nationwide.
- Children and young people are engaged and enthused by the ongoing work of the OCO and play a role in shaping its work priorities. The OCO is contributing to a change in Irish culture where children and young people are aware of their right to be heard and have a fair chance of developing their abilities, confidence and self esteem both in their childhood and as a foundation for their future role in society.

6. Summary of Strategic Priorities and Goals

During the next 3 years the Ombudsman for Children's Office sees its strategic priorities as the following:

Strategic Priority One: Positioning

Positioning the Ombudsman for Children's Office, as an effective, independent and accessible champion of children and young people's rights in Ireland;

Strategic Priority Two: Shaping

Shaping and influencing law, policy and practice to achieve the realisation of children's and young people's rights;

Strategic Priority Three: Involving

Maximising participation and involvement of children and young people in the work of the Ombudsman for Children's Office;

Strategic Priority Four: Advocating

Advocating and building support for children's rights in order to change attitudes and behaviour of society;

Strategic Priority Five: Evidencing

Developing a body of knowledge and evidence as a basis for sound policy and practice to improve outcomes for children and young people and to increase the understanding among professionals and volunteers of children's and young people's rights;

Strategic Priority Six: Building

Building the internal capacity of the Ombudsman for Children's Office to achieve its vision and mission.

The next section sets out the goals and objectives which will address these priorities.

7. Strategic Plan 2007-2010

Strategic Priority One

Positioning the OCO as an effective, independent and accessible organisation for children and young people:

Strategic Goals

- 1.1 To promote an understanding of the role of the Ombudsman for Children's Office among its stakeholders, partners and wider society:

Objectives

- 1.1.1 Communicate to the general public what the Ombudsman for Children's Office does;
- 1.1.2 Keep under review the public's understanding of the work of the OCO;
- 1.1.3 Develop relations with the Government, Oireachtas, public bodies, children's organisations and the NGO sector.

- 1.2 To establish 'points of presence' for the OCO outside of Dublin:

Objectives

- 1.2.1 Continue to ensure that that the services provided by the Ombudsman for Children's Office across its various functions are communicated effectively countrywide;
- 1.2.2 Develop an advocacy network for children's rights, building on the community and voluntary networks already in place.

- 1.3 To contribute to international networks and to develop the international profile of the Ombudsman for Children’s Office:

Objectives

- 1.3.1 Actively participate in and support the work of the European Network of Ombudsmen for Children (ENOC) and the British and Irish Network of Ombudsmen and Children’s Commissioners (BINOCC);
- 1.3.2 Develop a closer working relationship with the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People’s (NICCY) office to progress children’s issues appropriately on a whole-island basis;
- 1.3.3 Develop relations with inter-governmental organisations including the UN (in particular the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child), the Council of Europe and the EU.

Strategic Priority Two

Shaping and influencing law, policy and practice to achieve the realisation of children’s and young people’s rights:

Strategic Goals

- 2.1 To realise greater implementation of children’s rights standards, in particular in respect of marginalised and vulnerable groups:

Objectives

- 2.1.1 Provide an effective and impartial complaints handling system for children and young people;
- 2.1.2 Keep under review law, policy and practice relating to children.

- 2.2 To hold the authorities to account for the protection and safeguarding of children's rights and welfare:

Objectives

- 2.2.1 Conduct research and policy activities aimed at identifying gaps in rights protection and recommending change to fill those gaps;
- 2.2.2 Monitor compliance with children's rights and promote the adoption of rights-based approaches by authorities.

Strategic Priority Three

Maximising participation and involvement of children and young people in the work of the Ombudsman for Children's Office:

Strategic goals

- 3.1 To communicate effectively with children and young people:

Objectives

- 3.1.1 Develop an evidence base for communication with children and young people;

3.1.2 Develop the potential of new media to engage children and young people.

3.2 To bring children and young people to the core of the work of the Office by developing an effective model of participation:

Objectives

3.2.1 Establish mechanisms to enable children and young people to communicate their issues and views directly to the Ombudsman for Children's Office;

3.2.2 Establish effective structures and provide opportunities for children and young people to be actively involved in the development of the Ombudsman for Children's Office.

Strategic Priority Four

Building support for a culture that respects children's rights:

Strategic goals

4.1 To educate children and young people about their rights in collaboration with professionals:

Objectives

4.1.1 Develop creative education programmes for children and young people on children's rights and the role of the Ombudsman for Children's Office;

- 4.1.2 Develop a closer working relationship and support programme development with statutory and non government organisations that are working on children’s rights issues in the school and youth sectors.

4.2 To build support strategically on children’s rights issues:

Objectives

- 4.2.1. Contribute to the advancement of greater understanding among professionals, parents, civil society and the wider public about children’s rights;
- 4.2.2. Promote awareness about the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child;
- 4.2.3. Foster acceptance and support for the realisation of children’s rights.

Strategic Priority Five

Developing a unique body of knowledge and evidence:

Strategic Goals

- 5.1 To develop a knowledge management system which will support the work of the Ombudsman for Children’s Office:

Objectives

- 5.1.1 Development of an information management and retrieval system;
- 5.1.2 To develop mechanisms to capture organisational knowledge.

5.2 To develop strategic alliances:

Objectives

- 5.2.1 Contribute to developing understanding of children's lives by facilitating research;
- 5.2.2 Using the mandate of the OCO to advance the impact of research about children;
- 5.2.3 Collaboratively shaping the research agenda in line with our vision, mission and values;
- 5.2.4 Make an appropriate contribution to human rights education at third level.

Strategic Priority Six

Building the internal capacity of the Ombudsman for Children's Office to achieve its vision and mission:

Strategic goals

6.1 To establish robust quality control and accountability mechanisms for the OCO:

Objectives

- 6.1.1. Establish formal quality control procedures for the implementation and monitoring of the strategic plan;
- 6.1.2 Put in place financial planning and budgetary control processes to monitor and evaluate impact and use of resources.

- 6.2 To develop and implement a HR strategy which will create a commitment to the Ombudsman for Children’s Office and achievement of its strategic goals:

Objectives

- 6.2.1 To keep under review job roles, responsibilities and reporting arrangements to maximize individual staff contribution;
- 6.2.2 Develop performance management systems to support and develop staff and ensure that job performance objectives are linked to the strategic plan and progress is regularly monitored;
- 6.2.3 Ensure recruitment and selection processes reflect the strategy and values;
- 6.2.4 Develop staff’s competence and experience and ensure that job satisfaction is achieved through working in a positive, supportive environment and commitment to the goals and values of the organisation.

