



ombudsman
do leanaí
for children



STRATEGIC PLAN 2022-2024



Foreword

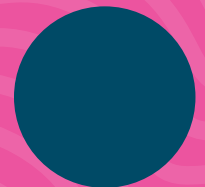
Since the Ombudsman for Children's Office (OCO) was established in 2004, the external influence and reach of the Office has increased, alongside the development of the internal structure and a rise in staff numbers. We have grown from a small team of ten in 2004 to a highly skilled organisation of almost forty staff in 2022. It is important that this change is reflected in how we set out our new strategic priorities. Therefore, the Ombudsman for Children's Office Strategic Plan 2022-2024 is a true product of the work of all staff members, reflecting their input and views on both our external focus, and how we should operate within the Office too.

In this, my third Strategic Plan, we are seeking to build upon the extremely positive work that the OCO has done over the past 18 years. In order to do this, I have sought input from our Youth Advisory Panel, external stakeholders, staff and management. I have drawn on the data available within our Office from investigations, research, policy and

legislation work, and crucially from our vast experience of listening to the voices of children over the past three years, particularly through the Covid-19 pandemic. In shaping our external goals we determined if our Office, specifically, can add value, and whether there is strong evidence that this is an important issue for children across the country. Our internal goals are built around continuing to grow a strong, positive and diverse workplace that has the highest standards of corporate governance, and where people are proud and happy to work on behalf of the children of Ireland.

I extend my sincerest thanks to all of those who helped us shape this plan, and a special thank you to the many children and young people who have engaged with us over the last three years – everything you have told us, and all that we have learned, has guided us in the process. The intelligence and insightfulness of children continues to amaze and motivate all of us in this Office, particularly in the resilience, courage and generosity to support others that they have shown throughout the Covid-19 crisis.

I look forward to working with my team to deliver on our Strategic Plan 2022-2024, and to making a difference for children in Ireland.



Who We Are

The Ombudsman for Children's Office (OCO) is an independent statutory office. Under the Ombudsman for Children Act 2002, we have two main roles:

- To deal with complaints made by, or for, children about the actions of public organisations
- To promote the rights and welfare of children under 18 living in Ireland

Our Vision

Our Vision is designed to encapsulate the OCO view of what we want to achieve for children - the kind of future to which our Office aspires.

We will use our independence and powers to bring about an Ireland where the whole of society actively hears and respects all children, and supports them to be safe and fulfilled in their lives.

Our Values

The OCO fulfils its statutory obligations through an ongoing commitment to be rights focused in all of our work and by ensuring that the spirit and meaning of the UNCRC are core to all of the engagements we have with children and public bodies.



Respect – is a commitment to show kindness and respect to all of the people, child or adult, we engage with whether inside or outside of our Office. We also strive to maintain and support a diverse, inclusive and equal workforce.



Integrity – is a pledge to operate with honesty and transparency in all of our dealings within the Office and with everyone we deal with. We will strive to build trust and maintain clear and open communications with children, complainants, public bodies and staff.



Independence – is a commitment to cherish and protect our independence so that we can say, with authority, the things that need to be said and hold public organisations to account.



Courage – is the openness to push hard for the rights of children. It involves accepting pressure and knockbacks in that pursuit, but it also means we relish constructive challenge so that we can continue to be self-reflective around our work.



Fairness – is a promise to work at all times to be fair in all of our dealings with staff, children, complainants and public agencies. Fairness is the backbone of trust and integrity both within the Office and outside of it.



Fun/Joy – is a determination to allow for and encourage fun within the work environment. This is an important element of a positive work culture and one that helps us cope with the difficult and emotionally charged work we all engage in every day.



GOALS

- 1** Children's Right to the Highest Attainable Standard of Mental Health
- 2** The Rights of Children with Disabilities
- 3** Children's Right to Education
- 4** Engagement, Awareness & Impact
- 5** OCO Expertise & Processes
- 6** OCO Culture & Work Organisation



1

Children's Right to the Highest Attainable Standard of Mental Health

Promote the inclusion of therapeutic mental health support and services within all schools. Drive improvements in mental health services for children, by highlighting the legislative, policy and resourcing requirements needed

- 1.1 Pursue outstanding OCO recommendations in this area and seek the implementation of measures that address on-going gaps in children's mental health services that are adversely affecting children
- 1.2 Influence the forthcoming mental health legislation, and other relevant legislation, through engagement with Government, the Oireachtas, the Department of Health and other stakeholders, so that children's rights are appropriately safeguarded by law
- 1.3 Using the knowledge we have gained from our work, the OCO will identify priorities and continue to advocate for the increased provision of mental health supports, including therapeutic services, in schools and other educational settings

2

The Rights of Children with Disabilities

Do all in our power to make children with disabilities in Ireland seen, heard and counted. Hold Government and State Agencies to account in respect of Ireland's commitments, including under the UNCRC and UNCRPD

- 2.1 Systematically identify and highlight measures required to promote access to, and participation in, education on the part of children with disabilities on an equal basis with other children
- 2.2 Research and present the rationale and evidence base for lifetime planning and the use of personalised budgets so that resources required to support each stage of a disabled child's development are identified and provided
- 2.3 Define and illustrate the adverse impacts associated with delays in assessments and obtaining services and resources for children with disabilities





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Children's Right to Education

Mobilise the OCO's statutory remit to influence the educational system of the future – an innovative and child centred education system that promotes wellbeing, is accessible to all and helps all children to reach their potential

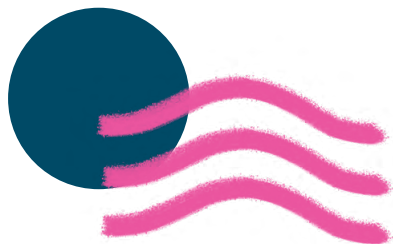
- 3.1 Advocate for appropriate, timely consideration to be given to children's rights in decisions affecting education during and following the COVID-19 pandemic
- 3.2 Work to influence the implementation of effective measures to combat bullying in all schools
- 3.3 Identify and pursue changes in legislation that are directed towards ensuring that children's right to, and rights in, education are upheld in respect of all children
- 3.4 Advocate for a child-centred approach to developments in education and in particular in relation to the Senior Cycle and the Leaving Certificate process

4

Engagement, Awareness & Impact

Strengthen the OCO's position and influence as the authoritative voice for advancing the realisation of children's rights in Ireland

- 4.1 Promote awareness of children's rights and the OCO's role amongst key audiences and explore new ways of connecting with our stakeholders
- 4.2 Using our statutory independence and powers, ensure that public organisations are held to account for reported actions/decisions affecting children's rights
- 4.3 Ensure that previous relevant strategic initiatives relating to the promotion and protection of children's rights including the rights of vulnerable children are pursued during the course of this current strategy
- 4.4 Update our Customer Charter commitments and monitor on-going adherence to same
- 4.5 Explore and adopt suitable approaches for streamlining calls/web queries to ensure that relevant OCO resources are used to optimal effect



5

OCO Expertise & Processes

Continue to innovate and adopt process efficiencies to improve our day-to-day activities across all units in our Office

- 5.1 Undertake a review of systems/technologies with a view to adopting solutions to enhance OCO operations and efficiencies
- 5.2 Complete a review of our approaches to the collection and use of data to ensure that we are making optimal use of same
- 5.3 Continue to leverage the value of our interventions by enhancing processes for tracking and monitoring the implementation of follow-up actions required of relevant agencies
- 5.4 Update our Customer Charter commitments and monitor on-going adherence to same
- 5.5 Explore and adopt suitable approaches for streamlining calls/web queries to ensure that relevant OCO resources are used to optimal effect

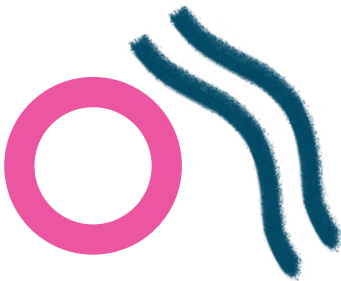


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OCO Culture & Organisation

Develop our culture to support staff within a positive and progressive learning environment and continue to demonstrate best practice in meeting our governance obligations

- 6.1 Undertake a review of the OCO's workplace culture, identify scope for enhancement and develop a supporting HR strategy which reflects the post-COVID operating environment and the needs of an expanded OCO team
- 6.2 Introduce customised knowledge management system and protocols to develop our institutional memory, enhance data/information quality and deliver associated efficiencies
- 6.3 Strengthen our internal communications, cross-unit working and information sharing arrangements, to optimise staff collaboration and promote innovation within and between teams
- 6.4 Establish internal working group to progress initiatives in support of equality, diversity and integration across the Office in line with our Public Sector Duty
- 6.5 Ensure that the OCO continues to meet the highest standards in relation to corporate services and its governance obligations



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