



Children's Rights Alliance

Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs

December 2005 saw the exciting announcement of a new Office of Minister for Children. It was renamed the Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (OMCYA) in May 2008 to reflect the office's expanded role in the development of policy and the delivery of services to children.

The OMCYA focuses on harmonising policy issues that affect children in areas such as early childhood care and education, youth justice, child welfare and protection, children and young people's participation, research on children and young people and cross-cutting initiatives for children. The OMCYA supports the Minister in:

- implementing the National Children's Strategy (2000 – 2010);
- implementing the National Childcare Investment Programme (2006 – 2010);
- developing policy and legislation on child welfare and child protection;
- implementing the Children Act (2001); and
- implementing *Towards 2016* commitments in relation to children's services.

The OMCYA also maintains a general strategic oversight of bodies with responsibility for developing and delivering children's services.

The Office of Minister for Children, a unit within the Department of Health and Children, consists of:

- the Minister's Office Staff and Advisor;
- the National Children and Young People's Strategy Unit (formerly the National Children's Office);
- the Childcare Directorate, which includes the Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme (EOCP). The staff and accompanying vote are being transferred from the Department of Justice to the Department of Health. The OMCYA is also responsible for the new National Childcare Investment Programme 2006-2010; and
- the Department of Health's Child Welfare and Protection Policy Unit, whose functions include child protection and some issues relating to childcare.

Also co-located within the Office of Minister for Children and Youth Affairs are:

- the Irish Youth Justice Service (Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform); and
- the Department of Education's Early Years Education Policy section (includes Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education (CECDE)).

This arrangement is designed to facilitate close co-operation and co-ordination of policy across the three departments involved. The staff and accompanying votes will remain with the Departments of Justice and Education respectively. Therefore the

decision-making regarding financial expenditure remains with these departments.

Children now have a stronger voice on issues that affect them, through the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, Barry Andrews TD, who attends all Cabinet meetings. The OMCYA's two previous ministers were Brian Lenihan (2002-2007) and Brendan Smith (2007- May 2008).

The National Children's Advisory Council (NCAC) continues in its current form and its remit also covers the broader responsibilities of the OMCYA.

Ms. Sylva Langford is the Director General of the OMCYA. Sylva can attend the management meetings of the three Departments and will liaise directly with each Secretary General.

Because of the expanded remit of the office and co-location, the OMCYA's staff has increased significantly from the National Children's Office original staff of 20.

As part of these changes, the Cabinet Committee on Children has been merged with the Committee on Social Inclusion to form the Cabinet Committee on Children and Social Inclusion. This Committee meets four times a year and is chaired by An Taoiseach.

Check out www.omc.gov.ie for more information.