

A world created by adults for adults: has 'listening to children' become a tick box exercise or a meaningful reality?: While much attention has centred on the rights of children to have a say in decision-making processes affecting them under Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989 (CRC), the extent to which these opportunities for input are in any way meaningful has escaped the same level of scrutiny. Article 12 CRC has arguably served as the principal catalyst for change in terms of reconsidering how we include the voices of children in legal decision-making. To listen to the views of children in an authentic way, requires viewing the circumstances surrounding the decision and the decision itself through the lens of a child. Moreover, it involves creating a child-sensitive space for participation as well as taking the time to listen and seriously consider the views of the child. Arguably however, since adults remain in control of these decision-making processes, there is a danger that the same overall decision-making structure will be maintained, while making some adaptations which attempt to make space for the views of those affected. The extent to which this approach facilitates true participation by children is questionable. Using Ireland as a representative example of the types of initiatives taken in the field worldwide, this paper will discuss the practical challenges associated with truly hearing the voices of children in matters affecting them globally. Indeed, since 2015, Ireland has witnessed significant constitutional and legislative change in this area which, while welcome, has presented many theoretical and practical challenges for professionals working in the system. In the past, children views were incorporated into the existing framework on an ad hoc and discretionary basis, with little consideration as to whether this was the most effective way of protecting their rights. This paper will consider whether much has really changed in Ireland since 2015. It will argue that rather than pigeon-holing the voices of children into existing adult processes, we need to seriously reconsider how we can create a truly inclusive system for children, particularly where decisions are being made which directly affect their lives.

Dr. Aisling Parkes is a Senior Lecturer in Law at the School of Law, University College Cork, Ireland. She specialises in researching and teaching in Children's Rights and Child Law with particular legal expertise in the field of Article 12 CRC and listening to children. Her book- *Children and International Human Rights Law: The Right of the Child to be Heard* (Routledge-Cavendish, 2013) focusses on the legal implementation internationally of the voice of the child including the right to freedom of expression. She has also co-authored chapters on Articles 12 and 13 in the recently published *Commentary on the Convention on the Rights of the Child* (OUP, 2019). Aisling has been actively involved in the design and delivery of a professional practice course on Article 12 CRC and listening to children which was offered to legal professionals across Europe. Indeed, she has provided training and education on listening to children in legal proceedings to members of the judiciary in countries such as Malta, Spain, Croatia and Romania over the past number of years. Her interdisciplinary research incorporates a range of additional areas which include the rights of children with parents in prison, adoption law and practice and child care proceedings. She is currently finalising an edited collection on this subject with Dr Fiona Donson – *Parental Imprisonment and Children's Rights* - to be published by Routledge in 2020. Aisling is a founding member and co-director of the newly established Sports Law Clinic at the School of Law, UCC.