

CRC has recommended that the government afford more powers to the Ombudsman in order to close any possible gaps in relation to upholding children's rights (Kilkelly 2008).

Another way to uphold Article 12 is to appoint a *guardian ad litem* (GAL) to represent the child's best interests as provided for under the *Child Care Act* (1991). However there have been issues regarding the geographical disparity between the appointment of GALs and concerns raised due to the unregulated, non-statutory nature of the service (Mac Mahon 2014). The CRC have also raised concerns in relation to insufficient provisions for the service while noting a high number of complaints relating to respect for the views of children as received by the Ombudsman for Children (UN Committee on the Rights of the Child 2006). There has been further confusion recently due to the absence of GALs from the proposed *Child and Family Relationships Bill* (2014) which allows for a child's views expert to be appointed in proceedings dealing with children. This can be seen as a huge step back for the sector as there are no current guidelines regarding the qualification, role or standards for the profession (Department of Justice and Equality 2014). One explanation for the perceived lack of implementation of key articles of the convention may be based on the conventions non-statutory nature and the lack of sanctions against countries who fail to comply wholeheartedly with its principles. The next section will discuss two of the most crucial developments underpinned by these articles and briefly outline the challenges which lie ahead to children's rights in Ireland.

Major Developments for Children's Rights in Ireland and the Challenges which Lie Ahead

There have been many positive developments for children's rights in Ireland in the wake of the UNCRC including legislation and policies in relation to equality, poverty, education, homelessness and youth justice. Many of these are predicated on the core principles of the convention, such as Article 3 and Article 12, including the *National Children's Strategy* (2000) and its successor the *National Policy Framework for Children and Young People* (2014). However, the extent to which these recent developments have improved children's rights remains debatable.

Kilkelly (2008) considers the development of the *National Children's Strategy* (2000) as the most significant policy development resulting from Ireland's ratification of the UNCRC. The overall vision of the strategy is one of "an Ireland where children are respected as young