



# Local participation strategies 0-25

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## Guidance

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## Local participation strategies 0-25

- Audience** Children and Young Peoples Partnerships, local commissioners in health, social care and education settings, providers of children's advocacy services, complaints Officers, Practitioners, Children's rights Officers and Organisations, Youth Forums, Youth Justice Board, voluntary sector children and young peoples organisations, Funky Dragon, The Participation Consortium, Welsh Local Government Associations, Community Health Councils, School Governing Bodies and the Children's Commissioner for Wales.
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- Additional copies** Annex 3 of this document is available in different formats for children aged 0-10 and young people aged 11-25.  
  
CD's of the full document are also available. The CD also includes a British Sign Language DVD of the National Standards of Participation document and the Extending Entitlement "Making it Happen" document.  
  
Copies of all documents and the CD can be obtained by emailing [yourvoice@wales.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:yourvoice@wales.gsi.gov.uk)
- Related documents** Stronger Partnerships for Better Outcomes:  
Guidance on Local Co-operation under the Children Act 2004.  
Extending Entitlement, support for 11 to 25 year olds in Wales.  
Cymorth Children and Youth Support Guidance

# Contents

	<b>Page</b>
1. Context	3
2. Children and young peoples participation - What do we mean?	5
3. The National Standards for Children and Young People's Participation	6
4. Introduction	7
5. Why local participation strategies?	9
6. The benefits of participation	11
7. The purpose of a local strategy	13
8. Development and resources	14
9. Content of a local strategy	16
10. Involvement of children and young people	20
11. Inspections	21
Annex 1 - Recent participation initiatives in Wales	22
Annex 2 - Participation Consortium discussion paper: Position paper - April 2004. (to be updated)	27
Annex 3 - Draft leaflet for 11-25 year olds: Local Good Guide to Participation	39
Annex 4 - National Standards for Children and Young Peoples Participation	40

## Summary

This Guidance has been developed by the Welsh Assembly Government working collaboratively with a range of national and local partner organisations and with children and young people. It is a key piece of the infrastructure jigsaw designed to support and drive forward children and young people's participation in Wales. Ensuring that all children and young people aged 0-25 have opportunities to contribute to and have their voices heard in decision making on issues which impact on their lives.

# 1. Context

**1.1** The Assembly Government is committed to driving forward implementation across Wales of the principles of Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child by taking steps to ensure that all children and young people aged 0-25 have opportunities to contribute to and have their voices heard in decision making on issues which impact on their lives. This commitment has been set out and reinforced in various Assembly Government strategic policies including *Stronger Partnerships for Better Outcomes* guidance on local duties to cooperate under the Children Act 2004, *Extending Entitlement, Children and Young People: Rights to Action*, and most recently the Assembly Government's response to the Beecham Report, *Making the Connections: Delivering Beyond Boundaries*, and *The Learning Country : Vision to Action*.

**1.2** Participation is now given a statutory basis in Wales under the Children Act 2004 that strengthens existing partnership arrangements for services to children and young people and requires each local authority and its partners to prepare 3-year strategic Children and Young People's Plans. Statutory guidance requires that children and young people participate in the work of the Children and Young People's Partnership; that requirement has been in place for over four years in relation to Children and Young People's Framework Partnerships, Young People's Partnerships and Children's Partnerships.

**1.3** The Act also provides for a Lead Director and Lead Member in each local authority, and their equivalents in Local Health Boards and NHS Trusts whose main responsibility is to make sure that partnership and cooperation are successful and that children and young people are listened and responded to in decision-making. This means that every Partnership identifies officers whose job it is to advise, guide and facilitate partners around joint working and children & young people's participation, in planning, monitoring and evaluating services provided. This is in addition to children & young people's involvement in decision-making processes.

**1.4** The Cabinet's commitment to a participative approach is also interwoven through other key policies for example Communities First, Health Social Care and Wellbeing Strategies Guidance, the All Wales Youth Offending Strategy, *Climbing Higher*, *Iaith Pawb*, the National Service Frameworks for children young people and maternity services, *Wales: a Vibrant Economy* and many more.

**1.5** The Assembly Government's commitment is very much in line with thinking across Europe and the principles of the Lisbon accord. The Welsh approach was modelled to the Commissioner and EU

**This is advisory guidance, produced by the Welsh Assembly Government to complement statutory guidance under the Children Act 2004**

Director Generals in the planning organisation and management of the UK EU Presidency youth event in Cardiff in October 2005, when it received widespread acclaim as being at the leading edge of practice.

**1.6** “Mainstreaming” participation to make it a normal part of the way organisations across Wales approach their day to day business is a process that will take time to achieve. The Assembly Government recognises that. We also acknowledge that organisations across the country start the journey from different places and that one size does not fit all. For that reason, we do not wish to be unduly prescriptive, but to offer our local delivery partners opportunities for flexibility and innovation.

## 2. What do we mean by children and young people's participation?

**2.1** In 2005, the Assembly Government ran a competition to find a soundbite which explains better what participation means. The winning entry was adopted by The Welsh Assembly Government as a definition.

**2.2** The Assembly Government is determined to ensure children and young people's participation is mainstreamed into normal business processes, such as developing policy, consulting citizens and stakeholders, procuring and auditing services, appointment of staff etc, in order to improve the quality of those processes. It is important that participation takes place across all sectors to including environment, transport, housing, play and health and not just areas traditionally associated with children and young people. A great deal has been achieved in the last few years to make sure that children and young people are supported to participate in government decisions in Wales.

**2.3** The Assembly Government wants to see participation embedded as a sustainable feature of the way organisations do business in Wales. It has therefore decided to produce this guidance to ensure that those partner organisations over whom we can exert influence take action to move forward towards working more participatively in their work which relates to children and young people aged 0-25.

**“Participation means that it is my right to be involved in making decisions, planning, and reviewing any action that might affect me. Having a voice, having a choice.”**

### 3. National Standards of Children and Young Peoples Participation

**3.1** The Participation Consortium and the Participation Unit within Save the Children Cymru have developed a set of National Standards of Participation. These are quality standards that can be used to determine bench marks and provide a means for inspecting and assessing participatory practice.

**3.2** The standards were endorsed and adopted by the Welsh Assembly Government in 2006 and were launched by The Minister of Education Lifelong Learning and Skills at a kite marking conference on the 25th January 2007.

**3.3** The National Standards are currently being piloted with different groups of children and young people in order to explore how to measure, collect evidence and to implement the standards successfully throughout Wales.

**3.4** A copy of the National Standards can be found at Annex 4 of this document.

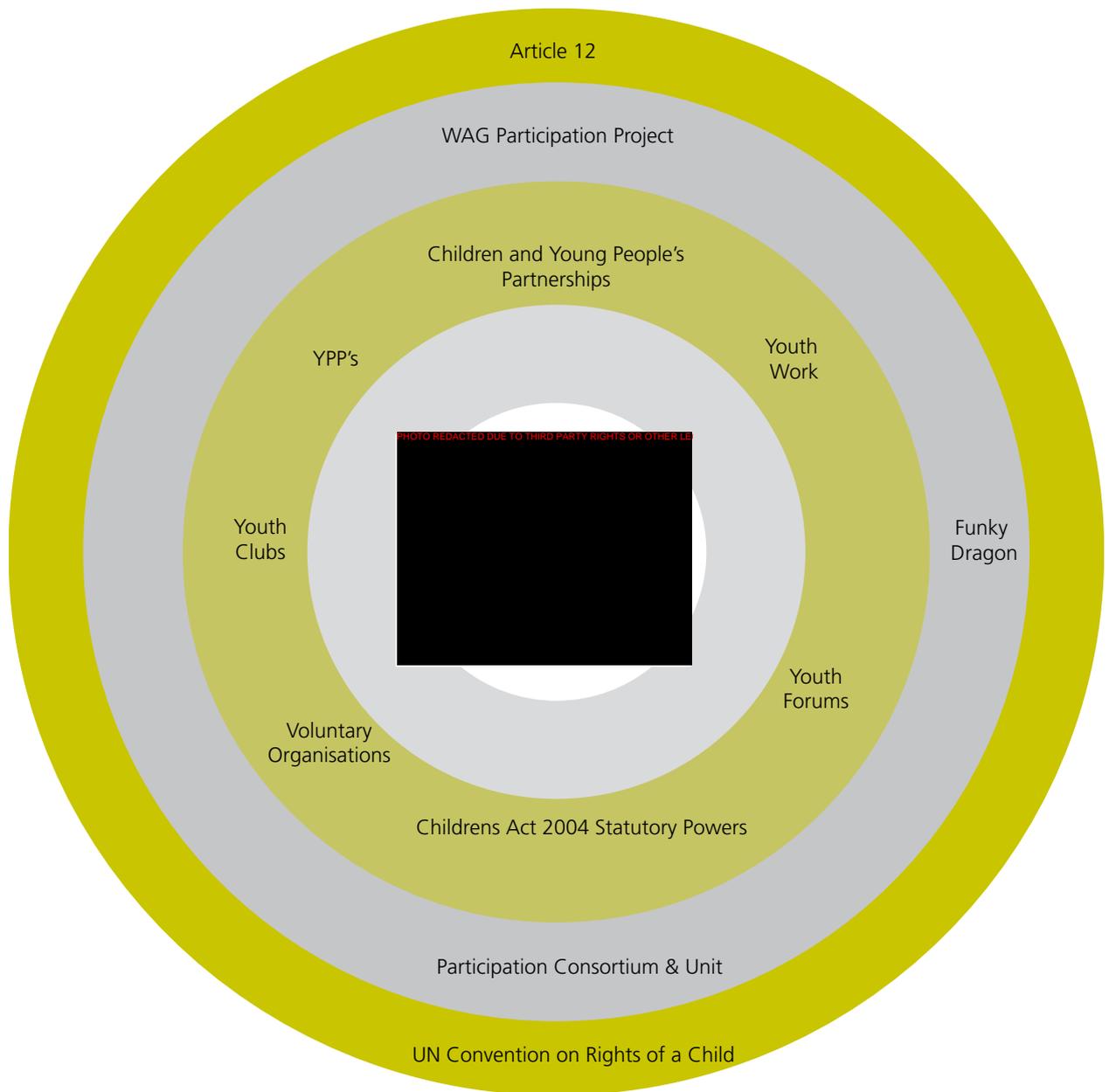
## 4. Introduction

**4.1** This Guidance has been developed by the Welsh Assembly Government working collaboratively with a range of national and local partner organisations and with children and young people. It is a key piece of the infrastructure jigsaw designed to support and drive forward children and young people's participation in Wales. During recent years a number of pieces of that jigsaw have been locked in place, including:

- Funky Dragon, The Children and Young People's Assembly for Wales
- The Children and Young People's Participation Consortium for Wales and the Participation Unit
- The Welsh Assembly Government Participation Project
- stronger local youth forums
- increased participation activity in the children and young people's voluntary sector
- statutory requirement for schools councils in all primary secondary and special schools from 1st November 2006
- statutory requirement for Associate Pupil Governors
- statutory guidance on pupil participation in decisions that affect them (summer 2007)
- statutory guidance on partnership, local cooperation and lead roles under s 25 and 27 of the Children Act 2004.

Further details of these and related initiatives can be found in Annex 1 of this document.

4.2 The diagram below illustrates these initiatives.



## 5. Why local participation strategies - and why now?

**5.1** The agenda for children and young people's participation in Wales is developing rapidly. In due course the Assembly Government and its partners may develop an agreed national action plan for driving forward future implementation.

**5.2** In the meantime, there remains an urgent outstanding need to improve local coordination in supporting and taking forward children and young people's participation across a broad area of activity and in the mainstream work of many agencies and organisations.

**5.3** The Welsh Assembly Government also wishes to ensure that use of Cymorth theme D funding (or other funding allocated by WAG to support participation) is maximised in every local area across Wales to support this process with effect from April 2008 at the latest, to coincide with the introduction of the single Children and Young People's Plan. We expect children and young people's partnerships to involve as broad as possible a range of children and young people in contributing to this process and to utilise resources including ESF when available.

**5.4** There is at present a variety of local practice; some areas have well-developed approaches to supporting children and young people's participation whereas others do not. Evidence from a recent review of Cymorth plans is that spending under theme D does not in all instances include support for a strategic local approach to participation for 0-25 year olds; in some instances whilst the mechanisms for participation exist, insufficient regard is paid by policy makers and those responsible for implementation to what children and young people have said. Sometimes children and young people have not received feedback as a result of their contribution, or feedback has been delayed.

**5.5** In order to address this deficit and to lock securely in place a further important piece of the participation "jigsaw", the Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning has asked officials to issue supplementary Guidance on Local Participation Strategies. Partnerships which need to reconfigure their Cymorth Plans in order to comply with the guidance will therefore have adequate time to develop exit strategies for projects which will no longer comply and for which Cymorth funding will therefore cease.

**5.6** Children and Young People's Partnerships and Young People's Partnerships have a crucial role to play in ensuring that local participation strategies as described in this guidance are developed

and put in place by April 2008 to support the needs of all local partner agencies working on developing and delivering policy provision and services that impact on any aspect of the lives of children and young people aged 0-25.

## 6. Benefits of participation

**6.1** Evidence from a number of sources for example Derry Hanman 2001 and Bernard Trafford ([www.bernardtrafford.com](http://www.bernardtrafford.com)) suggests that involvement in participative activity can have significant impact on children and young people, organisations working with and for the communities they live in.

**6.2** Some of the benefits for **children and young people** include:

- they feel respected and listened to - and learn to listen respectfully to others. This helps everyone to get on better;
- their self esteem and confidence improves
- they feel that they play an active and responsible part in their community, and understand that (and how) they can make a difference;
- they enjoy school/college/other learning better, feel more motivated and achieve more,
- less bullying;
- they learn and are able to practise important life skills such as problem-solving, decision-making, negotiation, listening communication and feedback;
- they are likely to feel more involved in a democratic process.
- Development/improvement of social skills and a better understanding of society.

**6.3** At the same time, **organisations** can also benefit from better participation by children and young people.

Some of the benefits include:

- more effective return on resources invested,
- better safeguarding,
- Improved behaviour;
- children and young people become more involved, and learn better;
- better targeting of resources,
- better quality and more inclusive decision-making,

#### **6.4** And **communities** can also benefit from changes made

Some of the benefits include:

- better relationships between older and younger community members,
- healthier children and young people,
- better designed young people specific facilities,
- less bullying;
- less vandalism,
- reductions in anti-social behaviour and crime levels,
- expansion of social capital.

## 7. Purposes of a local participation strategy

### 7.1 A local participation strategy will:

- ensure that children and young people have maximum opportunity to contribute, to have their voices heard and their views taken into account in decision making on all issues that affect their lives.
- put in place the mechanisms to support sustainable mainstreaming of children and young people's rights particularly UNCRC Article 12 throughout the delivery of all Children and Young Peoples Partnership member agencies/services.
- give a consistent message to children and young people from a range of different contexts including formal, informal and non-formal learning and community settings, that they have a right to have their voices heard on issues that affect them.
- further develop child- and young person-friendly mechanisms for children and young people's involvement in partnerships and planning.
- support sharing of practice between organisations with greater and less experience.
- support partnerships in developing innovative work on involving children and young people in finance and budget review mechanisms.
- in due course improve the quality and reach of services.
- provide a clear commitment from all organisations and agencies to developing children and young people's participation.
- develop a shared understanding of participation and commitment to implanting the National Standards of Participation.
- give a consistent message to organisations and agencies in a range of different contexts of their role in supporting children and young peoples right to be heard on issues that affect their lives.
- audit and identify progress and issues on participation and provide the mechanism to plan, develop and support the development of participation to overcome any barriers or obstacles which have been identified as local issues.

## 8. Development and resourcing of local participation strategies

**8.1** The Participation Strategy is a vehicle to assist key organisations locally to develop a shared direction and understanding around children and young people's participation, and to share practice and organisational learning around participation.

**8.2** Because of the variety of local arrangements currently in place, including some areas where local participation strategies have been in existence for a number of years, the Guidance does not provide a prescriptive "one-size-fits-all" template. Instead, it sets out what the Assembly Government regards as the **minimum essential components** of an effective local participation strategy, which we expect to be put in place in all areas of Wales from April 2008 at the latest. The Participation Consortium's "Blast Off Guides to Participation" may assist partnerships in meeting the Assembly Government's expectations.

**8.3** It will be necessary for Partnerships to identify resources to support the development and implementation of Local Participation Strategies, where these are not yet in place. Funding will need to be identified to adequately resource the minimum essential components at least; where this is not provided from other sources, WAG will expect Cymorth theme D funding, or whatever funding arrangement succeeds it, to be used for this purpose. This may therefore necessitate a review of existing spending priorities at local level.

**8.4** We are considering the necessity for a legislative requirement to reinforce the contents of this advisory guidance.

Statutory guidance under the Children Act 2004 makes Lead Directors Lead Members for Children and Young People's Services, and their equivalents in LHB's and Trusts, responsible for ensuring that children and young people participate in the preparation and review of the Children and Young People's Plan. This includes making sure that their views are effectively represented and that matters raised by them receive a response. This responsibility can be effectively underpinned by developing and putting in place a local participation strategy.

Stronger Partnerships for Better Outcomes states: "The introduction of these lead responsibilities may necessitate changes to the roles of Coordinators/Partnership Managers who, given their current tasks, are ideally placed to support the Lead Director." Partnerships may wish to consider the contents of this guidance in this context.

**8.5** The local participation strategy will need to be developed (and reviewed regularly in future) in close collaboration with key local networks, including the voluntary sector, the statutory and voluntary youth services, local forum participation coordinators, children and young people's voluntary organisations, local partnership coordinators, health and wellbeing coordinators, communities first, community safety and community strategy co-ordinators, with the officers responsible within the LEA for developing schools councils and pupil participation, and working with as broad as possible a range of local children and young people. It is essential that organisations and agencies involved in the partnerships named above and those that have an impact on the lives of children and young people within the local authority area engage in development of the strategy and gain ownership of it, as we expect it to inform and enrich their future practise both within the Partnerships and in their internal activity.

**8.6** Partnerships should also ensure the involvement of Welsh medium organisations in developing their local participation strategies in order to promote a participative approach whilst working with bilingual children and young people.

**8.7** In developing their strategy, local partnerships should be encouraged to adopt Article 12 of the UNCRC and the Welsh Assembly Governments definition of Participation in order to develop a common understanding across all agencies on Children and Young Peoples' Participation. Annex 2 to this guidance is a position paper "Working towards a definition" developed by the Participation Consortium for children and young people in Wales in 2004.

## 9. Content of local participation strategies

**9.1** As a minimum, local participation strategies should include agreed statements about the following in child- and young person-friendly language including timescales for activity planned but not yet in place:

- a) the arrangements in place or planned to develop participative mechanisms which will allow 0-10, 11-18 and 19-25<sup>1</sup> year olds involvement in decisions that impact on their lives .
- b) the arrangements the Children and Young People's Partnership adopt to ensure the local participation strategy and its delivery meet appropriate quality standards, and any kitemarking arrangements in place<sup>2</sup> including adoption of the National Standards of Participation (see Annex 4)
- c) contact details of organisations and agencies locally and nationally where guidance and support for participative models of working can be accessed.
- d) the training available locally to inform professionals on how to adopt a participative approach when working with children and young people, whether and by whom it is quality assured, and how adults from all organisations or as individuals can access it, collectively or as individuals.
- e) the arrangements which are in place locally to ensure that children and young people aged 0-25 from a broad range of special interest and minority groups can be supported to participate in ways which are acceptable to them. For example, young Muslim women may feel more comfortable being supported by a female worker from within their own community in the first instance, rather than engaging directly with existing forums etc.
- f) the arrangements in place to ensure effective two-way communication between Children and Young People's Partnerships, local forums and schools councils; between local

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<sup>1</sup> The arrangements are likely to differ dependent on the ages of the children and young people. Arrangements need to be developed for all of the 0 to 25 age range.

<sup>2</sup> For advice and guidance, Partnerships may wish to refer to the Participation Consortium Blast Off Participation Guides.

forums, schools councils and community groups representing children and young people eg Community First Partnerships, minority ethnic networks, local participation projects supported by national voluntary organisations etc and to facilitate wider pupil participation in decisions which affect them

g) the arrangements in place locally for children and young people 0-25 to elect representatives to the 3 Funky Dragon Grand Council seats for each area (statutory sector, voluntary sector, and schools councils). Also the process for putting forward nominations for the special interest Grand Council places which are:

- young people with long term illness
- lesbian/gay/bisexual/transsexual/questioning young people
- young carers
- young looked after people
- young disabled people
- homeless young people
- young people in the youth justice system
- minority ethnic young people

and how children and young people including those at primary secondary and special schools are informed about these arrangements.

h) how the Partnership will work to support Health Sector, colleges, universities and other statutory and voluntary organisations (eg Scouts, Guides, YMCA, Urdd) which are not part of the local authority to develop and mainstream participative systems and approaches into their working practices

i) a description of the effective practical arrangements put in place by local partner organisations to ensure adequate safeguarding of children and young people involved in participative activity- including making available adequate numbers of both male and female support workers and ensuring adequate safeguarding for younger and vulnerable children and young people who may be involved in participative activity with older young people (for further guidance refer to Local Safeguarding of Children Board)

- j) a description of the arrangements applicable to ensure that children and young people have opportunities and are supported to participate through the medium of Welsh or English language according to their personal preference.
- k) a description of how the Children and Young People's Partnership will work with organisations and services designed for children and young people to support their involvement in a meaningful way in governance and co-management of those organisations. For example, Funky Dragon young people on the Management Committee take the lead in decision-making, supported by the adults on the Committee. Funky Dragon members (children and young people) represent the organisation at some meetings and get involved in staff appointments etc.
- l) a description of how the Children and Young People's Partnership and any groups working to it will develop and deliver the approach set out in the strategy, and how it will monitor the strategy's impact in terms of outcomes for children and young people. This should include the monitoring of Welsh medium provision. This will need to include the arrangements the Children and Young People's Partnership will put in place for sharing of practice and experience, and providing support for partners who have less experience of working participatively from those which have more. This could be set out in an annual action plan, the role of which may be set out in statutory guidance on Children and Young People's Plans.
- m) the arrangements the partnership and partner organisations will make to let the broadest possible range of children and young people know about their rights, in particular Article 12 of the UNCRC and their right to participate in decisions that affect them and how they can be supported to do that locally. The Welsh Assembly Government is developing two generic leaflets, one for older young people and one for a younger age group; an early draft of the 11-25 year old version is attached for information at Annex 3.
- n) the arrangements the Children and Young People's Partnership will put in place to monitor and review the strategy's effectiveness in promoting a participative approach in working with children and young people. This will need to include evidence of the impact of working participatively on partner organisations' approaches to their mainstream activity as well

as the strategy's impact in terms of outcomes for a broad range of children and young people locally. "Demonstrating Success" outcome indicators may be useful for providing evidence in this context.

- o) how the Children and Young People's Partnership will work with a broad range of children and young people to develop and review the strategy in due course in the light of experience of its operation.
- p) the arrangements the Partnership will make to involve children and young people in budget monitoring and finance and reviewing recourses.

## 10. Involvement of children and young people in developing and reviewing the local participation strategy

**10.1** The broadest possible range of children and young people should be involved in the process of developing and implementing the strategy and in reviewing its effectiveness. The Assembly Government will expect to see empirical evidence of impact of their involvement both on the design and effectiveness of local services over time and in terms of the difference the strategy has made to children and young people's lives. "Demonstrating Success" is a possible model which could be used for evaluating the latter.

## 11. Inspection

**11.1** The Welsh Assembly Government has asked Estyn to report on specific elements of children and young people's participation (0-25) as an integral part of its inspection remit work from 2005-06 onwards. We intend to work with Estyn and, increasingly, other inspectorates so as to ensure that inspection of participation activity becomes a mainstreamed aspect of the inspection process across all statutory and voluntary agencies providing services which impact on children and young people's lives. These arrangements are consistent with the existing arrangements for inspection of youth support services and will need to be consistent with a protocol being developed by Estyn, SSIW and HIW, with the involvement of the Wales Audit Office, to underpin joint inspections of Children and Young People's Plans and Children and Young People's Partnerships from 2008.

## Recent Participation Initiatives In Wales

### **1. Welsh Assembly Government Participation Project**

The project was set up in 2004 to ensure that the Assembly Government would model the behaviour it wishes to promote to others by making sure that children and young people aged 0 - 25 could become actively involved in internal processes in a wide range of activities - for example by:

- Helping WAG departments to write child and young person friendly consultation documents and to run child and young person friendly consultation events;
- Involving children and young people in developing policies right from the start;
- Involving children and young people in appointing civil servants and public appointments to relevant posts;
- Monitoring and evaluating the impact of policy on children and young people's lives;
- Auditing and procurement of services which are designed to support children and young people.

The project has expanded through European funding to establish regional "pools" of children and young people with relevant skills and expertise; in due course it will also work to promote this approach to other public sector organisations in Wales.

### **2. Funky Dragon**

In 2002, Funky Dragon, the Children and Young People's Assembly for Wales was established in partnership with WAG, National Voluntary and umbrella organisations and children and young people. Funky Dragon is an example of a peer-led organisation: children and young people are involved in the management committee, are trustees and are actively involved in everything the organisation does. It makes sure that the views of children and young people are heard and taken into account when decisions are made, particularly by the Welsh Assembly Government.

### **3. The Children and Young People's Participation Consortium for Wales and the Participation Unit**

The Participation Consortium is a multi agency strategic body. It is working at a national level to develop capacity and practice in terms of the participation of children and young people aged 0-25 in decision making in Wales. The Consortium was initiated by the Welsh Assembly Government in 2003. The Consortiums' approach to developing participation ensures co-ordination and the sharing of good practice, avoids duplication and acknowledges diversity. The Participation Consortium received funding from the Welsh Assembly Government to establish a Participation Unit. The Unit is hosted by Save the Children and acts as a focal point for the strategic development of participation.

For further information on the work of the Participation Consortium and the Participation Unit, please contact:

Anna Skeels, Participation Unit Manager on 029 2039 6838 or [A.Skeels@savethechildren.org.uk](mailto:A.Skeels@savethechildren.org.uk)

Eleri Thomas, Chair of the Consortium and Assistant Programme Director, Save the Children on 01352 750363 or [E.Thomas2@savethechildren.org.uk](mailto:E.Thomas2@savethechildren.org.uk)

### **4. Local partnerships**

WAG has encouraged local partnerships which plan and co-ordinate services for children and young people at the local level (ie former Children's Partnerships, Young People's Partnerships and Children and Young People's Partnerships) to involve children and young people in all aspects of their activity.

Partnerships are expected to make sure that **ALL** children and young people have opportunities to give their views and be listened to, especially those who sometimes don't get a chance, such as children and young people from minority ethnic groups and Gipsy/ traveller communities, young people with special needs, young carers, young care-leavers, young offenders, and gay/lesbian/bisexual young people etc.

Involving children and young people includes a great deal more than simply consulting them about organisation-led proposals. Some innovative activities which have already been successful in Wales and elsewhere, for example are:

- children and young people working alongside organisations from the outset in developing new policies and procedures
- reviewing and monitoring impact and evaluating effectiveness,
- involvement as panel members in staff appointments
- audit and procurement activity
- developing child-and young-person friendly documentation
- facilitating events for other children and young people and/or for adults
- training adults in ways of working effectively with children and young people
- kitemarking services as meeting agreed standards for working effectively with children and young people
- “co-governance” and “co-management” with children and young people working alongside adults in running services designed for them
- peer-led where children lead an organisation themselves with support from adults as and where they ask for it.

Further details of participative approaches are included in the Consortium position paper developed in 2004; copy attached at Annex 2.

The Children and Young People’s Participation Consortium for Wales have produced a number of “Blast Off to Participation” guides offering practical advice to organisations wishing to develop participative approaches.

The Welsh Assembly Government has set out its expectation in a number of different contexts since 2002 that it expects to see evidence from local partnerships that children and young people are fully involved in the work of key partnerships. During 2006-07, the Assembly Government set a specific national priority for Young People’s Partnerships (YPPs) to expand participative activity to reach out further to special interest/hard to reach young people. There are opportunities for work undertaken via multi-agency children’s and young people’s partnerships to model effective participation practice that will encourage individual member organisations to work in a similar way outside the partnership context. And partnerships are excellent vehicles for sharing effective practice.

## **5. Youth Forums**

Most local authorities in Wales have now set up directly or commissioned other organisations on their behalf to set up local youth forums to help young people aged 11-25 at a local level to develop the skills and confidence to put forward their views in meetings where adults are making decisions. Other groups, particularly in the voluntary sector are working with younger children so that they too can have their say. Sometimes children and young people get involved in running these organisations, as is the case with Funky Dragon.

## **6. Schools' Councils**

The Assembly Government has made legislation requiring every primary secondary and special school to have in place a school council meeting under new rules from 1st November 2006. Guidance was issued during autumn, 2006. Practice guidance and support is available from the website ([www.schoolcouncilswales.org.uk](http://www.schoolcouncilswales.org.uk) or [www.cynghorauysgolcymru.org.uk](http://www.cynghorauysgolcymru.org.uk))

## **7. Pupil Participation**

Schools councils are only one aspect of participative schools. Work is continuing to develop and put in place across Wales a coherent and consistent approach to children and young people's participation in formal and non-formal education settings.

## **8. Advocacy**

The Welsh Assembly Government has a long-standing commitment to review advocacy services for children and young people - in particular to extend the provision of advocacy to all children in health, education and social care settings. This has been reflected in our response to the Children's Commissioner for Wales' reports "Telling Concerns" and "Children Don't Complain".

A key factor in developing new guidance has been to create an "independent" advocacy service in which both children and providers can have confidence. The conclusion of "A Study of Advocacy Services for Children and Young People in Wales" published in July 2005 was that many children were not convinced that the advocacy services they were offered were truly independent. In response to these two considerations, a New Service Model has been drafted.

Advantages of the proposed New Service Model for providers should include greater independence from individual statutory agencies, and a resulting improved commissioner/provider relationship. Benefits for commissioners should include: better co-ordinated provision (reduction in overlapping services); improved capacity within and diversification of services; better quality services to meet the needs of children and young people.

The New Service Model proposed by the Welsh Assembly Government will be facilitated by joint commissioning activities undertaken on a regional basis. A first priority for regional commissioning will be to develop an integrated specialist advocacy service for particularly vulnerable groups of children and young people.

It is hoped that pilot schemes for the new service model can start to run from April 2007.

## **9. Information and Advice**

The Welsh Assembly Government is committed to ensuring that young people aged 11-25 can access high quality information and advice as and when they need it to assist them in making effective decisions. Clic is the second national information project and can be accessed via: [www.cliconline.co.uk](http://www.cliconline.co.uk).

## Children and Young People's Participation: Working Towards a Definition

### **A discussion paper**

#### **Background**

In March 2003 the Welsh Assembly Government initiated a 'task & finish' Group specifically to look at a structure for enabling and supporting children's and young people's participation in decision-making across Wales.

The initial membership, determined by WAG, consisted of Black Voluntary Sector Network, Children in Wales, Cardiff Black Youth Network, CWVYS, Framework Partnership Co-ordinators, Funky Dragon, Save the Children, Tros Gynnal, Voices from Care, WCVA and Wales Youth Agency. It is acknowledged that the 'consortium' is not an exclusive group and membership and representation will be addressed in due course. It is currently operating as a steering group developing a co-ordinated approach to participation.

The initial meetings outlined key capacity building elements that a central unit should aim to achieve. These were:

- Involve children and young people (directly/meaningfully)
- Provide developmental support
- Disseminate good practice
- Sell concept (of participation) to policy makers
- Offer training, consultancy and guidance
- Support the establishment of WAG participation standards and uphold and promote these across Wales

The Group considered these elements in greater depth and set out principal tasks for the Unit. These covered:

- Co-ordination
- Assessment
- Enabling
- Training

To enable the group to implement these ideas an application for funding was submitted to the WAG Children and Family Grants Scheme to establish a Participation Unit with Save the Children acting as the host organisation on behalf of the group. Based on the success of this application the group has moved forward and several wider discussions have taken place, including trying to ascertain an all-encompassing definition of participation.

'Children and Young People's Participation: Working Towards a Definition' is a discussion paper, which we hope will stimulate debate and encourage comments and contributions. It is not intended to be a definitive version but more of a 'living' document that will metamorphosis as needs and services demand.

## **Introduction**

This paper has been prepared by Save the Children on behalf of the Participation Consortium in response to a request from the Minister for a definition of Participation. Members of the Consortium and others experienced in the field agree that Participation is a multi-faceted concept. This is both strength and a weakness, providing opportunities and some constraints. The fact that there is no single way to support children and young people's participation and that the most suitable level of involvement and activity will depend on many factors - including the decisions, contexts, participants and values of the adults involved inevitably means that the concept of Participation means different things to different people. While there are concerns that the quality of practice is too variable, we must be careful that we do not impose too narrow a definition that could constrict the creativity and diversity that has characterised the development of much good practice around children and young people's participation in Wales. The vision of the Consortium is to build on current developments to achieve full and active participation of all children and young people in Welsh society.

This paper aims to briefly consider some of the key questions underpinning a definition and a common understanding of children and young people's participation. The paper concludes with some recommendations for taking forward the strategic development of children and young people's participation in the planning, delivery and evaluation of public policies, services and initiatives that affect children and young people.

## **Context**

The Welsh Assembly Government has demonstrated a commitment to developing the participation of children and young people in some of its policy documents, most notably the *Frameworks for Partnership (2002)* and *Extending Entitlement (2001)*. It has supported the strategic development of children and young people's participation by a number of means including: establishing an independent champion for children; establishing a children and young people's assembly (Funky Dragon); requiring local strategic planning partnerships for children and young people to consult with children and young

people; and providing some short term, dedicated funding to local authorities to establish these processes (including Youth Forums) with regard to young people aged 11 - 25.

These developments are set within the framework of the Assembly Government's commitment to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child now formally adopted as the basis of all its work for children and young people (*Rights to Action, WAG, 2004*).

Young people's participation in service and policy development has a relatively long history in Wales particularly in the voluntary sector. The Youth Work Curriculum Statement agreed in 1992 explicitly supports the principle of young people's participation. Another important policy development has been the EU White Paper, *A New Impetus for European Youth, (2002)* which strongly emphasises the need for young people's participation.

### **What do we mean by Participation?**

The literal definition of participation is 'taking part'. It is well recognised that there is a spectrum of degrees of power in taking part, from giving opinions on a predetermined issue for adults to decide upon (consultation), to young people choosing their agenda and taking their own decisions (full participation). As with many powerful and popular concepts, 'participation' is used (and sometimes abused) to describe many different relationships and activities. The discourse illustrates that Participation is a process not an event and Empowerment is the outcome.

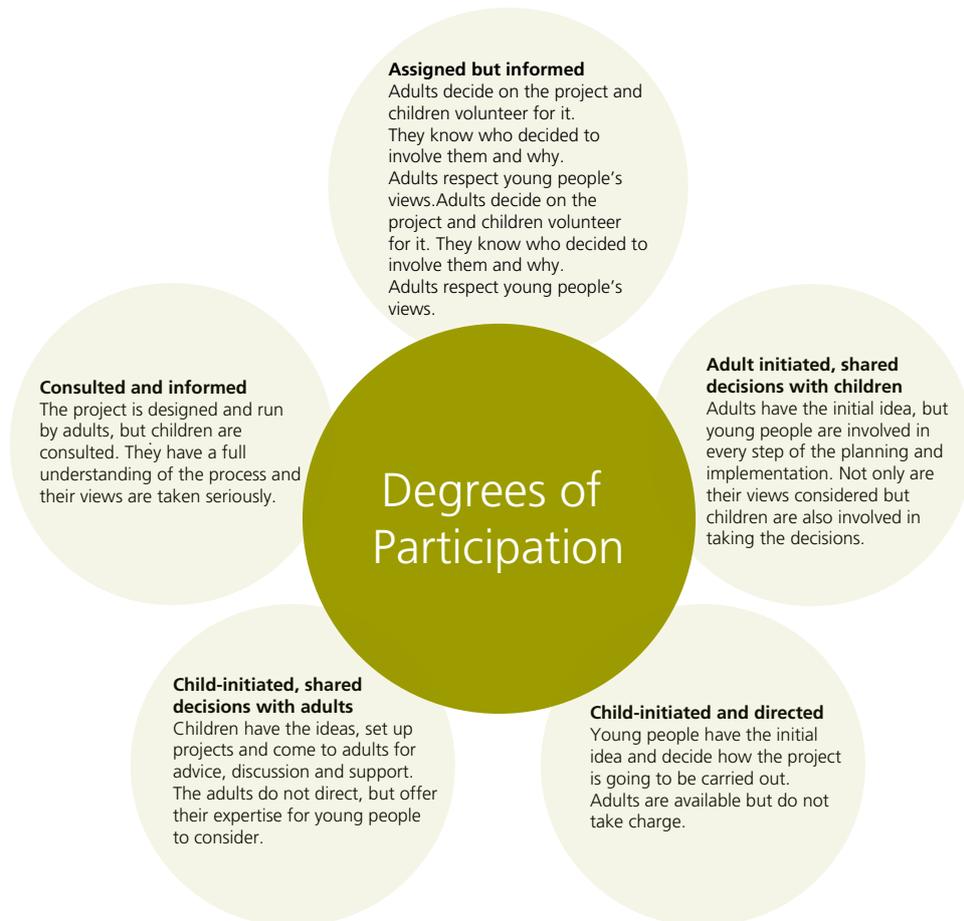
Hart<sup>3</sup> provides an alternative typology that incorporates consultation as one of the many methods of participation. Hart's famous 'ladder' has seven levels of participation ranging from 'manipulative' and 'decorative' at the bottom of the ladder to child initiated projects and sharing decision making with adults at the top.

Hart's ladder seems to suggest that all participation of children and young people should be on the highest rung. In recent years some commentators have questioned the use of the ladder concept as implying a hierarchy of value. A more useful model is that illustrated below, displaying the degrees of participation in a circular layout. Such a model moves away from the assumption that projects or organisations should always aim for the highest rung on the ladder, and recognises that different approaches may be best in different circumstances.

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<sup>3</sup> Hart, Roger A. (1992) Children's Participation - From Tokenism to Citizenship. UNICEF International Child Development Centre.

## Degrees of Participation



*From: Treseder, P. (1997) Empowering children and young people training manual: promoting involvement in decision-making. Save the Children.*

Other conceptual models will be developed as work on establishing children and young people's participation in Wales moves forward. Funky Dragon and other agencies working with young people would like to explore a model that could be used as part of the participation inspection framework once a common understanding of what we mean by 'participation' has been agreed.

**There are three key conditions which must be satisfied in order to ensure that people in general, and children and young people in particular, are included in the decision making process:**

### **What needs to be in place for children and young people to participate?**

- Cultural attitudes must be such as to encourage participation;
- Political, legal and administrative structures must be in place in order to ensure rights to participation;
- Economic and social conditions must be such as to enable people to exercise their rights.

Because the status and position of children in our society has traditionally not allowed for children to be considered competent actors in their own right (rather they have been viewed as 'not yet's' or 'little people in the making') there is also much work to be done in developing the skills and confidence of adults to ensure they can appropriately support children and young people to participate and in developing the skills and confidence of children and young people themselves.

As the number and type of activities designed to facilitate children and young people's participation have developed apace in Wales over the last three years, young people themselves have increasingly questioned the sincerity of some approaches and requested that their participation in policy and service development should include the following outputs:

- Demonstrable evidence that information gained via children and young people's participation has been used to inform organisational decision-making;
- Feedback to children and young people about how their input has led to changes, or an explanation as to why this has not happened (yet or at all) and how their concerns could be taken forward in other ways. Young people should be able to hold the consultation sponsor accountable for the information, e.g. in receiving satisfactory and adequate feedback.

It is essential to provide child or young people friendly information to children or young people before there are consulted or involved, so that they can understand the subject matter, the purpose and the process. Thus enabling them to make an informed choice as to their participation (and re-inforcing the voluntary nature of their participation).

True participation must also take account of the diverse needs, circumstances and aspirations of the children and young people involved. Those children who are most often excluded from the activities of mainstream society by disability, homelessness or poverty, for example, are those children whose voices are least likely to be heard in decision making. Efforts must be made to reach these children young people and to include them in decision-making.

### **Why Participation?**

Reflecting on what we are hoping to achieve and why provides important pointers for our working definition. Identifying the longer term goals will help us to monitor and assess the impact of developments on the different realms of children and young people's daily lives.

All children and young people are entitled to participate. Article 12 of the Convention states that children have the right to express their views and opinions on all matters and to have those views valued and taken into account. Participation is part of the process of valuing, respecting and including children and young people in a democratic society. There are also political, social and economic rationales. Services and policies will be more effective and efficient when they are planned, delivered and evaluated on the basis of the identified needs of the people using them, and with their involvement.

Participation provides opportunity for children and young people's personal, social and political development, which in turn supports their development as active citizens in their community. Participation can offer practical experience and learning to exercise responsibility.

### **Taking Children and Young People's Participation forward in Wales**

The strategy for developing children and young people's participation in Wales will need to contain a number of distinct elements including:

- Action to establish children and young people's participation across all functions of government not just youth work and social care;
- Action (at all levels) to support attitudinal and cultural change;
- Action to develop skills and capacity amongst adults, children and young people in all policy and service areas;

- Action to establish and sustain local participative structures.

Appropriate resources will need to be allocated; meanwhile further work needs to be undertaken on assessing needs and reviewing the current state of play before agreeing specific targets and actions. We also need greater clarity and a common understanding of just what it is we are trying to achieve. At a national, strategic level it would be most helpful to agree **core principles** that should guide participatory practice and **quality standards** that can be used to determine benchmarks and provide a means for inspecting and assessing participatory practice. As a means of further developing good practice (and potentially as a means of protecting young people who wish to raise particularly radical or challenging issues) it may also be beneficial to establish a national **kitemarking** scheme<sup>4</sup>.

In Wales, elsewhere in the UK and indeed, across the world there is a great deal of work already underway on developing all three of these concepts. The following brief review is intended to provide a starting point for further discussion and debate.

### **A Statement of Core Principles**

There are a number of examples of statements of principles or ethical guidelines that should be taken into account throughout the process of children and young people's involvement. For example, the National Council for Voluntary Youth Services' Principles of Youth Participation, (undated) and Breathing Fire into Participation: the Funky Dragon Guide (2002)). A review of the literature suggests that a list of basic principles or ethical guidelines will include:

- **Voluntary:** Children and young people's participation should be voluntary and they should have a choice about how they get involved and at what level
- **Non-discrimination:** The diversity of children and young people is recognised and valued. Participation is accessible to all young people.

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<sup>4</sup> Kitemarking is a popular concept in the field essentially describing a process whereby an organisation gains recognition that it has achieved a standard or a number of standards set and inspected by another body. It usually means that the organisation can then display the kitemark (a widely recognised statement or symbol) on their materials and buildings.

- **Informed:** Children and young people need to be sufficiently informed about the purpose, process, expected outcome and implications of their participation;
- **Respect:** Children and young people's contributions are respected, valued and taken into account;
- **Best Interests:** Children and young people should be able to expect to benefit and find value in the experience;
- **Feedback And Follow Up:** Children and young people should be informed about the outcome of decisions.
- **Review And Evaluation:** Working towards continuous improvement.

## National Standards

The key difference between a principle and a standard must be that a standard is capable of assessment. As previously noted one of the most significant features of the current state of participation in Wales is that practice is variable. While affirming the need to utilise a variety of approaches, the current variations in the quality of practice are not acceptable. There is a growing body of evidence<sup>5</sup> that effective practice makes a demonstrable difference in outcomes. A framework of national standards linked to an inspection and audit regime would assist in addressing this variation in practice. National standards have been described as public promises to give a specific quality or level of service. They can be linked to progressive targets to improve performance.

A number of national standard frameworks have already been developed for organisations to involve young people. These include *Hear by Right*<sup>6</sup> for local authorities and *Charter Mark*<sup>7</sup> for public and voluntary sector services. The National Service Framework for children for the NHS is in development. Other sets of standards have been developed at the local level using award schemes. These include

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<sup>5</sup> See Kirby, P with Bryson, S. (2002) *Measuring the Magic? Researching and Evaluating Young People's Participation in Public Decision Making*. Carnegie Young People's Initiative.

<sup>6</sup> Wade, H, Lawton, A and Stevenson, M (2001) *Hear by Right; Setting Standards for the Active Involvement of Young People in Democracy*, National Youth Agency and Local Government Association

<sup>7</sup> Fajerman, L. and Treseder, P (2002) *Children are Service Users Too? Save the Children*. London

Durham, *Investing in Children* and Oxfordshire's *Children's Rights Checklist*. These examples range from simple (*Durham Investing in Children*) through intermediate (*Oxfordshire Children's Rights Checklist*) to complex (*Hear by Right*). In Wales, the Clywed kitemark for children's participation is being developed in Gwynedd. Swansea Youth Forum are engaged in developing a similar kitemarking scheme and Funky Dragon is actively considering the feasibility of a national award scheme.

A review of the literature on standard setting conducted by the Carnegie Young People Initiative<sup>8</sup> suggests a number of factors to bear in mind when preparing standards for young people's participation:

- Standards need to be easy to understand for staff, the public and especially for young people;
- It needs to be simple to assess whether a standard has been met;
- Young people should be involved throughout the entire process of standard setting, including selecting standards, piloting, monitoring and reviewing;
- Standards chosen should build on what is already in use;
- Failure to meet a standard must trigger action;
- Standards need to link to real outcomes. Achieving the standard should mean that not only have young people been involved but also, action has resulted.

If a national standards framework is to deliver on improving practice at the level that makes a difference to children and young people, the framework will have to be backed up by the following:

- Adequate resources including staff time and money for children and young people's active participation;
- Training for adults, young people and children (including modules on the core principles of participation to be included on training courses for professionals working with children and young people, e.g. for teachers, youth workers, social workers etc.)
- Infrastructure - a standard is only the visible sign of a broader management system that makes sure the standard is met;

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<sup>8</sup> Cutler, D (2003), *Standard! Organisational Standards and Young People's Public Decision Making*. Carnegie Young People Initiative.

- Inspection and Evaluation - audit and review are an essential part of raising performance by the use of standards. Most organisations do too little. A standards framework must require evidence to demonstrate that the standard has been reached;
- Monitoring to ensure that effective, local participative structures are developed and sustained;
- Opportunities to celebrate success - results should be publicised and evaluations shared.

National Standards would have to maintain a degree of flexibility and be adaptable to local structures.

Above all the recommendation is to 'Keep it Simple'.

The Consortium's advice is to start off at a basic level (with near universal applicability) progressing to a more demanding system of standard setting gradually. This might best be achieved by a staged approach such as Hear by Right's 'emerging, established and advanced' or with 'bronze, silver and gold' standards.

## **Recommendations**

Agreeing core principles and implementing a national standards framework for children and young people's participation will provide a solid basis from which to continue the drive to establish the right of children and young people in Wales to participate in decisions that concern them.

Young people are already experiencing a sense of achievement from participating effectively in the political decision making process in Wales. One issue already being raised by Funky Dragon is the need for sustainable arrangements (political, legal and administrative structures) to secure the involvement of young people in public policy-making in Wales in the event of a change of government either at Westminster or in Cardiff or both in the future. The Assembly Government may wish to give further consideration to its position on this issue, both in terms of its existing powers and any future safeguards it may wish to introduce.

In the longer term an overall strategy for embedding children and young people's participation in the culture of how we do things in Wales is required. Development of such a strategy might possibly be led from within the Assembly Government, working in close collaboration with the Consortium, AWYPO, and other key partners, and must be informed both by an analysis of the current situation,

research into practice in Europe and further afield, and evidence as to 'what works'. The Minister may wish to give further consideration to this proposal.

Meanwhile, we recommend that the Assembly Government (at official level) work with Members of the Participation Consortium to:

- Develop draft national core principles and standards for consultation and agreement.
- Promote common understanding of the key elements of children and young people's participation (as reflected in this document) utilising accessible formats.
- To develop a strap line for children and young people's participation that is easily understood by children, young people and other members of the public.
- Ensure that political, legal and administrative structures are in place that ensure rights to participation not just in the 'traditional' areas of youth work and social care but in all public services that affect children and young people.
- Promote diversity and principles of non-discrimination to ensure that all children and young people have opportunity to participate.
- Identify & share good practice in children and young people's participation.
- Identify resource, training and development implications.
- Promote and support where necessary, changes in organisational cultures and attitudes to engender respect and value for children and young people's rights.

For further information please contact the Participation Consortium  
c/o Save the Children telephone 02920 39 68 38

Participation Consortium Members are:

Save the Children

Wales Council for Voluntary Action

Children in Wales

Wales Youth Agency

CWVYS

Children and Young People's Partnership Co-ordinators

Funky Dragon

Tros Gynnal

Voices from Care

Children's Commissioner (observer status)

Youth Link Wales (observer status)

Welsh Assembly Government (observer status)

Anne Crowley

Senior Policy Adviser

Save the Children

On behalf of The Participation Consortium

April 2004

## The Good Guide To Participation

The Welsh Assembly Government (WAG) says all children and young people aged 0-25 should have a say on things that affect them, and that adults should listen.

This is what you can expect to see in your area to help this to happen:

- lots of different opportunities to get involved such as through community groups, school councils, youth forums, women's networks, gay and lesbian projects so you can choose something that feels right for you
- how you can link with people in your area involved in other networks and groups to share information and experiences
- how to participate in school and college, both by getting involved in the school/college council and in other ways such as healthy schools or eco-schools projects
- how you can get involved in Funky Dragon (children and young people's assembly for Wales)
- if you are a Funky Dragon rep, what help you'll get to feed back to other people in your local area and represent them
- how you can get involved in health services for children and young people. For example, you might get to have a say in the best way to provide sexual health advice to young people, or the best places to locate clinics.
- how you can get support from workers in either English or Welsh language according to your preference
- names and contact details for people in your area who can tell you more about the stuff in this leaflet .

Partnerships should consider how information will be made available to a broad range of children and young people including electronically, published in minority languages and in large print.

**“Participation means that it is my right to be involved in making decisions or planning and reviewing and action that might affect me. Having a voice, having a choice”**

Having a Voice – Having a Choice

## Do we meet your standards?\*

\*‘We’ means anyone asking children and young people to participate. ‘You’ have a right to expect these standards.

"Participation means that it is my right to be involved in making decisions, planning and reviewing any action that might affect me. Having a voice, having a choice"



INFORMATION

PHOTO REDACTED DUE TO

**This means:**

- Information that is easy to understand for everyone
- Adults working with you who know what is going on and are up front and clear.

**We will:**

- Ensure everyone has enough information to get properly involved
- Let you know what difference you being involved will make
- Inform you about who is going to listen and make changes.

IT'S YOUR CHOICE

PHOTO REDACTED DUE TO

**This means:**

- You choose if you want to get involved or not
- You choose to work on things that are important to you
- You choose what you do and how you do it.

**We will:**

- Give you enough information and time to decide if this is something you want to do.

NO DISCRIMINATION

PHOTO REDACTED DUE TO

**This means:**

- Children and young people are all different but you all have the same right to have a say about the things that matter to you.
- We want everyone to feel welcome and be able to get involved if they want to be.

**We will:**

- challenge any discrimination
- get in touch with children and young people in lots of different situations
- get you involved in things you want to do.

RESPECT

PHOTO REDACTED DUE TO

**This means:**

- Everyone has a chance to have a say, your opinions are important and we will respect them.

**We will:**

- listen to your ideas, views and experiences
- take you seriously and treat you fairly
- work with you to do something about the things you tell us are important
- work with you to help change things for the better.

YOU GET SOMETHING OUT OF IT

PHOTO REDACTED DUE TO

**This means:**

- We want you to enjoy and benefit from taking part
- We know that you have other things to do in your lives as well!
- Making sure that participating is a positive not a negative experience.

**We will:**

- work in safe, fun, and enjoyable ways
- make the most of what you know
- do positive things that build your confidence
- meet in friendly places that are easy for all young people to use
- value and respect what you have to offer.

FEEDBACK

PHOTO REDACTED DUE TO

**This means:**

- It's really important that you know what difference you have made and how your ideas have been used.

**We will:**

- keep you up to date with what is happening
- give feedback as soon as possible and in ways that are easy to understand for everyone.

IMPROVING HOW WE WORK

PHOTO REDACTED DUE TO

**This means:**

- We want to learn and get better at the way we work with you.

**We will:**

- look at the way we work with you and how to improve it
- ask you what has gone well and what needs to change
- make sure your views make a difference to the way we make plans and decisions.



These are the agreed children and young people's participation standards for Wales