

# DfES Children and Youth Board 2005-2006 Independent Evaluation Report

Saskia Neary & Kelly A Drake



Research Report  
No 793

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*DfES Children and Youth Board  
2005-2006  
Independent Evaluation Report*

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## Executive Summary

### 1. Introduction

In 2005 The National Children's Bureau (NCB) and the British Youth Council (BYC) (hereafter termed the 'partners') successfully tendered to manage the 2005-2006 DfES Children and Youth Board (CYB). This Board was the second year of a two-year pilot project for the DfES.

The primary aim of the partnership project between was to support children and young people's involvement 'at the heart of Government'. NCB was the accountable body for the partners.

NCB and the BYC, on behalf of the DfES, commissioned Kelly A Drake and Saskia Neary (Independent Consultants) in September 2005 to carry out an Independent evaluation of the CYB. The report covers the six month evaluation period from September 2005-March 2006.

### 2. Aims of the evaluation

The consultants were given a brief to evaluate the effectiveness of the DfES Children and Youth Board with the following objectives;

- To describe the processes involved in setting up and running the Board
- To seek the views of key stakeholders about their participation in this process
- To monitor the activities of the Board – residentials, meetings with the Children's Minister and regional work
- To assess the personal development of Board members
- To assess the impact of the Board on the development of policy and practice
- To write a report to the DfES on its findings by the end of April 2006
- To be innovative in approach

In addition, the DfES asked that the following be taken into consideration within the overall evaluation:

- What has the partnership achieved in relation to its stated aims and objectives?
- What are the views of key stakeholders (children and young people involved first and foremost) about the way in which work on the Children and Youth Board has developed?

- What did the partners do, with whom, and how does this relate to planned activity and reach in the future?
- What are the advantages and disadvantages of developing the Board in this way?

The key stakeholders involved in this evaluation were: the twenty-five children and young people on the Board, staff from both partner organisations involved in the project, DfES staff and officials who worked with the Board, and parents, carers and support workers who supported the Board members.

### **3. Methodology for the evaluation**

#### **3.1 Approach to the Evaluation**

The consultants developed an 'ethical' good practice approach that aimed to reflect and model the key values that underpin both partners approach to their work with the Board, as well as to ensure that the interests and needs of Board members were prioritised within the evaluation process.

#### **3.2 Methodology**

A five stage methodology to collect evaluation data was agreed with the project manager, Janine Shaw (NCB). This included the following tasks: collection and desk review of existing documentation (e.g. the original partners' tender document, the 'Roles and Responsibilities' Document and the 2004-5 Independent Evaluation Report etc), interviews with key adult stakeholders (DfES staff and policy leads, NCB and BYC staff, parents, carers and support workers), development of qualitative questionnaires for all adult stakeholders, creative evaluation activities and 'toolkits' for Board members and finally attendance at ministerial meetings and Board residentials.

### **4. Context of the 2005-2006 CYB**

Fundamentally the partners recognised that this pilot project was an 'organic and developmental' process, developing and changing over the year. The original tender was described as a framework for the development of the Board, rather than a plan 'set in stone'.

This tender for the operational management of the Board made it clear that the Board would be attached to the DfES and not the partners. The DfES was not directly stated as the 'client', but this is inferred from the fact that ownership of the Board is with DfES, and the day-to-day delivery is 'contracted out' to the partners. The Board would focus 'their involvement in the department as a reference group' and it was made clear that the Board was not envisaged as a lobbying group.

Greater detail about the staffing, partner roles and responsibilities, and work plan envisaged for the Board is contained within the full evaluation report.

## 5. Key findings and improvements for practice

This has been a complex project to evaluate, resulting in a wide range of detailed findings and suggested improvements for practice summarised under five key headings below. The consultants recommend that all stakeholders refer to the full report to ensure that all learning from this project is captured.

There is no doubt that the Board has been a life changing experience for all its members, and that this second year of the pilot has been very successful. An excellent model has been developed to engage children and young people at the heart of government.

The following section outlines the key improvements for future practice that will take this from being a very good project, to being an exemplar.

### 5.1 Operational and management processes involved in setting up and running the Board

#### **The recruitment process of the Board**

The recruitment process was well planned and executed. The partners successfully raised the profile of the Board via an expansive network of organisations resulting in high interest among children and young people nationally.

The diversity of applicants in terms of age range, educational ability, race, gender and background provides evidence of a successful recruitment process. The resulting Board was referred to by all stakeholders as 'exemplary' in terms of its diversity.

#### **Improvements for future practice**

- Recruitment should be carried out over a longer period of time, with a staff team dedicated to involving children and young people in each step of the process. It would be advantageous to involve previous members of the CYB in future recruitment.
- The DfES need to decide whether the focus of the CYB is to be UK wide or England only.

## **Managing the day-to-day running of the Board**

All staff gave 100% commitment and energy to the day-to-day running of the Board. The Board Co-ordinator has been a key player in ensuring the successful and on-going involvement of children and young people.

A complex dynamic was created for the partners by having to work to externally set deadlines, whilst at the same time having to manage the day-to-day individual support needs and abilities of a diverse group.

There were some tensions relating to day-to-day communication between the partners and around authority for decision-making. This was in part due to the four key members of staff being sited in two different buildings and led to some lack of clarity around day-to-day tasks relating to the support, communication with and administration of the Board.

## **Improvements for future practice**

- At least two full time staff members are needed to co-ordinate and support a Board of this size, scope and remit. There should be a full time administrative post with responsibility for all databases, logistical arrangements, booking of venues etc, sited within the same office as the co-ordinating staff suggested above.
- The DfES should think about its own level of staffing in relation to this project. A dedicated full time member of staff would ensure that the DfES has adequate time and capacity to work alongside partners to carry out the necessary tasks aimed at building culture and context to ensure the Board has a real impact on decision making.
- Adequate time needs to be allocated to the set up, day to day running of the Board and key tasks. Clarity is needed around responsibility for each task and for decision-making.
- The role of the support workers, parents and carers needs to be reviewed. A network of externally recruited and paid support staff could be better utilised to do the local day-to-day support of Board members.
- Better use of IT would enable members to share their on-going experiences as they carry out their work regionally
- Board members would like opportunities to meet more frequently (regionally and nationally). Satellite groups of children and young people could meet to work on policy and feedback to policy officials and the Minister.
- The Expert Resource Group should be reviewed as a supporting structure and reinstated for a new Board.

## 5.2. Board Activities

### Residentials

The partners have been extremely successful in both creating a sense of 'a Board' and of 'belonging to a Board' in very short periods of time during the three residential events. The partners were highly effective in equipping members with the necessary skills to participate; informing them about Government and policy and assisting them in planning regional work and reporting back on results. The partners successfully achieved a balance between meeting the needs of the DfES for the Board to consider specific policy areas while at the same time focussing on the developmental needs of individuals on the Board. The residentials provided children and young people with well planned and executed opportunities for personal and skill development.

### Improvements for future practice

- It is vital that a year plan is made early on in the Board set-up phase and that information regarding Board activities and the programme of events is available in advance for support workers, parents, carers and members. The DfES should provide key dates well in advance.
- Greater clarity about boundaries, roles and expectations of support workers, parents and carers is needed.
- Residentials over more days and opportunities for meetings in the regions would reduce pressures around very full agenda's and lack of time. This would also enable on-going contact between members, peer support and effective planning of regional work.
- Input to residentials from a range of external trainers using different approaches might help to engage all members of a diverse Board as well as relieve pressures on project staff.
- Well planned social events need to be specific to the age ranges of the members.

### Ministerial meetings

Board members reported that the three Ministerial meetings were well-organised, with plenty of opportunities to share their views on all their work.

### Improvements for future practice

- Longer meetings with more breaks between items.

- The Board and Minister could spend time together to discuss and clarify the purpose of the meetings and how to run them in a way that will be effective for all Board members.
- A child or young person chairing and another helping people to speak who may be quieter.
- A more creative and fun meeting environment using ice breakers, energisers, small round table discussions where officials and Ministers move around and get to know the members more personally.
- More thought needs to be given to how the Board will feedback to the Minister – less flip charted bullet points and more concrete recommendations.
- More thought needs to be given to feeding back to the Board. This would give members a better sense of their impact; where their views are taken and what does or does not happen as a result of Ministerial meetings.
- There may be a role for the Board in providing training to the Minister and officials on how to improve the meetings, and how to engage children and young people.
- Holding ministerial meetings in the space created by Board members in their preparation meeting would enable the Minister to meet children and young people ‘on their own territory’, rather than the Board being moved to a more formal, adult space.

## **Policy/Regional Work**

The range of methods that the Board used to carry out their regional work, as well as the reach of this work was particularly impressive. The degree to which they had support locally seems to have been a key to the success or otherwise of the regional work.

## **Improvements for future practice**

- More information specifically for support workers, parents and carers would ensure that they know what is involved and what is expected of them as supporters of regional work.
- Development of a local support network with paid sessional staff would better facilitate members to gain access to groups of children and young people for consultation purposes etc.
- Members suggested clustering into smaller regional groupings with allocated workers from the national project staff.

- Outgoing Board members could help new members with regional work via a buddying system.
- Members suggested that less time between residentials and more enforced deadlines for regional work would help with setting goals.
- A higher profile for the Board via TV programmes such as Blue Peter, Newsround and/or regional TV networks or local/national press would ensure that more local people and 'gatekeepers' recognise and support the CYB members.
- Members suggested that separate training events would help support them to plan regional work specifically.
- The development of a conference style event for Board members attended by up to 200 children and young people was suggested as a means of enabling the Board to actively seek out views and debate policy issues with a wide range of children and young people.

### 5.3. Impact of the Board

#### Impact of being on the Board for members

The report contains a number of case studies developed by the consultants that detail the impact on members. Membership of the Board has been a life changing experience for the majority of children and young people this year.

Six key elements have been identified, from the perspective of the children and young people, which enabled the Board to have such a profound impact on their experience. These are:

- The interview to gain a place on the Board
- The residential events
- The regional work
- Meeting with the Minister
- Importance of supportive relationships with NCB/BYC project staff
- Importance of supportive relationships with other significant adults

#### Improvements for future practice

These improvements are direct quotes from Board members:

- 'Same members for more than a year. This way the people who are involved will know each other (including skills and weaknesses) and be able to work efficiently for the common good'.
- 'Meet more regularly, not only 3 times for the whole time because this way we can get help not only from Lucy and the others, but from one another'.
- 'There should be more publicity of what we are doing as well, because when I did my regional work, no-one knew what the NCB and BYC were and that way I felt a little bit let down, as I expected kids to know, but they weren't given the opportunity to!'.
- 'We want to see the results from our discussions, work and meetings from the DfES'.
- 'Involve children and young people in drafting government policies'.
- 'The children and young people should be able to contact any MP in any department and choose policies to work on'
- 'I would like to meet other ministers and be able to contact Beverly Hughes directly'.
- 'Whilst on the Board I would like to be invited to talk to my local council members about local issues'
- 'We should do regional work in pairs and groups as far as possible'.
- 'Have more people on the Board so more voices could be heard and have more 1 day meetings'.
- 'Make sure that people from Scotland and Wales were able to pass on their findings direct to their own assemblies, who know about the Board'.
- 'Give more choice to children and young people as to when and where meetings will take place'
- 'Provide more material i.e. questionnaires etc. for regional work'
- 'Start regional work at the first residential so we can work on more than one policy'
- 'Have a big CYB internet site and advertise in schools and libraries'

## **Impact of the Board on DfES policy and practice**

All DfES officials reported that the Board has had a very positive impact on the internal policy making and practices of the Department. Policy leads and officials see real benefits of the CYB's input to their work and want to *strengthen* the

connections between the CYB's work, policy making and implementation in the DfES and wider Government.

DfES officials see the Board as an important element in a wider cultural change. They see more potential for the Board to ensure that the voices and opinions of children and young people are, as in the original aim for the Board, **involved within the very heart of Government**. Officials recognise the Board's value in demonstrating true principles of participation practice and policy.

### **Improvements for future practice**

- The DfES should revisit its vision for the Board and involve members in these internal decision-making processes.
- The DfES should continue to work with external expert agencies to deliver the operational side of any follow on initiative. The DfES should ensure adequate staffing to carry out its remit.
- The DfES need to think more strategically about the two year investment in this initiative and how it can be capitalised on for the future.
- A process needs to be established and agreed that enables the DfES to identify the policy areas that they wish the Board to focus on for the year.
- Tracking mechanisms need to be created to enable longitudinal studies of the impact of the Board on policy and practice.
- Case studies of the Board's work and its impact on the development of policy would work well to promote not only the members themselves but also the department's vision in relation to making participation a reality within the heart of government.
- The DfES should ensure that any delivery partners are contracted to develop and cascade programmes of training, awareness raising and capacity building internally to help departmental teams 'create the conditions' in which children and young people's participation can really make an impact.

## **5.4. Managing communications**

### **Internal and external communications**

The partners have been very successful in managing all areas of communication with the Board demonstrated by the consistently high level of attendance by members throughout the project. Some Board members felt that meeting up between residential and ministerial meetings would improve their communication.

In terms of communication between the Board and the DfES, it seems at times that policy information and questions were delivered in tight timescales and not always in a language that was immediately accessible to members. Due to a four-month gap in DfES staffing, it appears that communications suffered and the direct involvement of the DfES in setting the agenda and making its needs known was reduced. This gap in staffing, clearly had an impact on the development of mechanisms to ensure communication, tracking and feedback.

All stakeholders reported that external communication about the Board and its achievements was very limited.

### **Improvements to internal and external communications**

- Better use of IT might help future Board members to communicate amongst themselves and share experiences and learning, particularly around carrying out regional work and sharing resources.
- Better promotion of opportunities for policy officials to engage directly with the CYB and to attend participation training would be beneficial (including how to make policy documents and consultation paperwork young person friendly).
- The Minister in particular could develop a closer on-going dialogue with Board members, via increased numbers of ministerial meetings, attendance at residentials and regional meetings.
- Senior DfES officials and the Minister should have opportunities to feed ideas into a CYB work plan at the earliest opportunity. This would help gain buy-in from policy teams, give a human face to the work of the Board and necessitate the development of more effective tracking and communication mechanisms throughout the department.
- Increased promotion of the Board within the Department, (for example, via internal departmental publications and communications) would lead to a greater understanding of the benefits of participation, and help officials to develop their 'customer-focused approach' more generally.
- An external communications strategy needs to be developed for any follow-on initiative. External communications across government should be a key element of a strategy to raise awareness of children and young people's involvement in policy development and consolidate their impact on a range of cross cutting issues.

### **5.5. NCB, BYC and the DfES working in partnership**

The original vision for the investment in the Board has been met and the project has demonstrated that the involvement of children and young people within the very heart of government is valuable and achievable.

The DfES are clearly very impressed with the work of the partners. The NCB/BYC partnership has consistently delivered to a high standard on all the key objectives outlined in the original paperwork.

The evaluation of the three way partnership identified a need for an overall DfES strategy for participation to provide the context within which the Board sits and can successfully contribute and operate. Without this there is a risk that the Board will have limited impact on bringing about cultural change within the DfES.

### **Improvements to the partnership working**

- The DfES needs to review and restate its vision for the Board and its involvement in policy making. The Board cannot be the only mechanism that the DfES develops to foster a participative culture.
- Following clarity in vision for the Board and a clear statement about the level of involvement and therefore the mechanisms needed to support this, the DfES need to think about creating a fully resourced team to focus on managing the project and build its own capacity to 'create the conditions' internally for a participative culture, if indeed, this is what it wants.
- It would be a brave step for the DfES to be ambitious in its vision for participation and include the Board as one key element.

## **6. Key strategic recommendations**

These key strategic recommendations follow an in-depth analysis of the improvements suggested throughout the report.

### **Recommendation 1**

#### **Disseminate improvements for future practice and strategic recommendations from the evaluation report**

The key findings, improvements for future practice and recommendations found within the report should be cascaded to all relevant staff in the DfES, NCB and BYC. Cross DfES departmental understanding and buy-in to these strategic recommendations needs to be secured. Staff within the department should be specifically encouraged to develop a clear understanding of the benefits of children and young people's participation within policy making and be encouraged to take ownership of the improvements for future practice.

## **Recommendation 2**

### **The DfES should clarify the vision for the Board and its role as part of a wider departmental strategy for participation**

It is recommended that the DfES address a range of strategic questions at the highest senior levels within the Department. These questions are:

- What is our vision and expectations of a Children and Young People's Board?
- What purpose does the Board serve - for the Minister, for wider policy officials, for both?
- What do we mean by participation?
- What levels of participation do we expect for members of the Board?
- What role is envisaged for the Board; is it part of an overall participation strategy, or is it a sounding board/ focus group structure?
- How will we address the risk of the Board becoming a bolt-on structure which could lack influence in bringing about a culture of participation within the DfES?
- What staffing structure best fits the strategy we want to implement within the Department?

Further detail about this recommendation is given in the full report.

## **Recommendation 3**

### **Develop a good practice model of Board management**

Time to 'fine tune' the model for the Board should be given to ensure that all structures, systems and paperwork developed for the project are brought together into a central manual to ensure that all learning is captured. This manual could be cascaded to other government departments and participation leads within regional Government Offices who may wish to replicate the model. It could also be used to inform future contractors and define contractual specifications.

## **Recommendation 4**

### **Review and clarify the 'partnership' roles and responsibilities and key structures for the delivery of the Board**

The DfES and partners should review all expectations of a commissioning model to deliver the Board both in terms of what implications it has for the department, as well as any organisation(s) it commissions to deliver the operational aspects of the Board in the future.

**Recommendation 5**  
**Involve Board members in operational and management developments**

All suggested improvements for the development of the Board in the future should be discussed and implemented in partnership with children and young people.

**Recommendation 6**  
**Develop a communications strategy to ensure best practice principles for all internal and external communications**

It is specifically recommended that investment and resourcing be put into developing a web based communication system for Board members, as well as a comprehensive external communications strategy.

**Recommendation 7**  
**Capitalise on the commitment of past and existing Board members**

Fifty children and young people have been expertly trained and supported to contribute to government policy and decision-making. Keeping in touch with these children and young people should be a priority for DfES in order to track their progress and involve them in future initiatives.

## 1. Introduction

The National Children's Bureau (NCB) and the British Youth Council (BYC) are key national voluntary sector organisations working to promote the voice, interest and participation of children and young people.

In 2005 NCB and BYC (hereafter termed the 'partners') successfully tendered to jointly manage the 2005-2006 DfES Children and Youth Board (CYB). This Board represented the second year of a two-year pilot project for the DfES. The primary aim of the project was to work in partnership with the DfES to support children and young people's involvement 'at the heart of Government'. NCB was the accountable body within the voluntary sector partnership.

This report is an independent evaluation of the 2005 - 2006 CYB. It has been written by Kelly A Drake and Saskia Neary who were employed as external consultants following submission of a competitive tender in September 2005. This report covers a six month evaluation period, from September 2005 to March 2006 and is written for the DfES, NCB and BYC, and of course the members of the 2005-2006 Board.

## 2. Aims of the project evaluation

NCB and the BYC, on behalf of the DfES, commissioned the consultants to evaluate the effectiveness of the DfES Children and Youth Board. The following objectives were set out in the original consultancy tender document;

- To describe the processes involved in setting up and running the Board
- To seek the views of key stakeholders about their participation in this process
- To monitor the activities of the Board – residentials, meetings with the Children's Minister and regional work
- To assess the personal development of Board members
- To assess the impact of the Board on the development of policy and practice
- To write a report to the DfES on its findings by the end of April 2006
- To be innovative in approach

In addition, questions were added to the consultant's brief to reflect the DfES objectives for the evaluation. The DfES asked that the following be taken into consideration within the overall evaluation:

- What has the partnership achieved in relation to its stated aims and objectives?

- What are the views of key stakeholders (children and young people involved first and foremost) about the way in which work on the Children and Youth Board has developed?
- What did the partners do, with whom, and how does this relate to planned activity and reach in the future?
- What are the advantages and disadvantages of developing the Board in this way?

The key stakeholders involved in this evaluation were:

- The 25 children and young people on the Board
- Staff from both partner organisations involved in the project
- DfES staff and officials who worked with the Board
- Parents, carers and support workers who supported the Board members

### **3. Methodology for the evaluation**

The consultants identified and agreed the focus for each stage of the evaluation process in line with the project brief submitted within the tender. This section clarifies the approach taken, the underpinning values and the methodology developed to carry out the evaluation. At the end of this section, the consultants summarise a number of important reflections that arose during the life of the evaluation, which they believe could be useful to any future independent evaluation of the initiative.

#### **3.1 Approach to the Evaluation**

The consultants developed an 'ethical' good practice approach that aimed to reflect and model the key values that underpin both partners approach to their work with the Board, as well as ensuring the interests and needs of Board members were prioritised within the evaluation process. In particular, the consultants bought a creative and innovative approach in order to ensure an accessible and inclusive process including the voices and perspectives of all Board members as well as all other adult stakeholders. The consultants were systematic in their collection of data and all focus groups and interviews were taped and transcribed in order to ensure accuracy of information.

Information was provided for CYB members and support workers/ parents and carers via a designed leaflet to support their understanding of the approach taken by the consultants. The leaflet explained the concept of 'independent evaluation' and introduced a variety of 'tools' to enable members to contribute their learning

to the evaluation process. This approach was intended to generate knowledge from the perspectives of everyone involved in the development of the CYB.

### **3.2 Evaluation process and staging**

Combinations of qualitative and quantitative techniques were used to collect data. The evaluation took place over six months and included several stages. These stages, described below, ensured a close contextual reading and understanding of the CYB's work, the project's structures, processes and personnel and the wider context of NCB, BYC and the DfES's support of the Board.

### **3.3 Methodology**

#### **Stage 1: Collection and review of existing documentation**

Relevant documentation relating to the development and communication structures devised for the CYB was identified and reviewed. These documents included:

- CYB set-up and recruitment documents (application forms, monitoring forms, CYB training needs analysis, children and young people's expectations of being involved) and background information on CYB and partners
- Partnership agreement between NCB and BYC
- Evaluation documentation (including the Children and Youth Board Evaluation Report for 2004-2005, existing feedback from the Minister, parents/carers and Board members)
- Workplans and training plans devised by the partners
- CYB quarterly reports to the DfES
- Roles and responsibilities for each stakeholder group

#### **Stage 2: Evaluation meetings with key adult stakeholders**

The main purpose of the evaluation with key adult stakeholders was to gain an understanding of their role, and their perspective as regards what worked well and was effective and what may have hindered progress. All stakeholders had the opportunity to reflect on the lessons learnt and offer ideas for building on success and improving the CYB for the future.

It was important to gain a clear understanding of the model of partnership developed by NCB and BYC to deliver on the operational side of the CYB. Specific attention was given to understanding staffing levels, budget allocation, roles and responsibilities, communication between partners and with the DfES. Lucy Read (NCB) and Jules Mason (BYC) were interviewed from the partner organisations. Janine Shaw (NCB) was interviewed at the outset of the consultancy to agree overall methodologies and timescales.

Similarly key staff from the DfES were interviewed, specifically Lucy Andrew, Eilidh MacDonald and Patrick Grant from the Children's Views and Interests Team. A meeting was scheduled with the Minister which was later postponed and although she was invited to contribute her views to the consultants, this feedback was unfortunately not received.

Parents/ carers and support workers were also interviewed via a focus group and one to one interviews during residential.

### Stage 3: Adult stakeholder questionnaires

A range of qualitative questionnaires were designed to elicit stakeholder views on the key operational and management processes developed for the Board.

Four different questionnaires were designed to elicit the views of:

- All staff at NCB and BYC involved in CYB delivery
- Senior staff in the DfES Children's Views and Interests Team
- Policy leads at the DfES
- Support workers, parents and carers

These questionnaires also aimed to gain a sense from 'adult' stakeholders of their perspectives of the impact of the Board on government policy as well as on the children and young people themselves.

### Stage 4: Evaluation with Children and Youth Board members

A leaflet was written and designed by the consultants and sent to all Board members to introduce the evaluation approach. A 'toolkit' was specifically created to capture children and young people's personal evaluations and progress with the Board. Each tool aimed to elicit their views on the impact of the Board, their personal development and how they felt the Board could be improved for the future.

The CYB Evaluation 'toolkit' comprised of a scrapbook, a logbook, reflection sheets, disposable cameras and tape recorders (with a set of trigger interview questions). Board members chose the tool(s) they specifically felt able to use. Members were encouraged to include photos, notes and anything else they felt would provide evidence of learning and/or change. Members reported that the tools were useful in capturing their perceptions of the Board's impact on themselves and government policy, as well as supporting their accreditation processes (ASDAN). The tools also enabled the consultants to feedback to the partners on specific issues arising for Board members during the life of the project.

It was essential to ensure that all paperwork developed by the consultants was developed with NCB and BYC to ensure Board members were not overloaded. The consultants therefore added monitoring questions to existing NCB regional work surveys developed for Board members. Regional monitoring data was also passed to the consultants by NCB.

- Scrapbooks

This tool was designed for Board members who felt more comfortable with using pictures and drawings rather than writing as a means of self expression. Six members of the Board completed and returned scrapbooks.

- Logbooks

The logbooks were designed specifically for Board members who were more comfortable with detailed writing. Logbooks asked members to reflect in detail upon, and monitor how their learning improved their abilities on the Board as well as in wider contexts, such as at school. Three members of the Board completed and returned logbooks.

- Reflection Sheets

Reflection sheets were designed to monitor member's accounts of any significant experiences, how they felt, what they learned and any subsequent support needs. Seven members of the Board filled out reflection sheets. In total, twenty-four completed reflection sheets were submitted.

- Tape recorders with questions

Four children and young people recorded their experiences via interviews, sharing what they enjoyed, what they didn't, what worked well and what didn't. These tapes were transcribed and utilised by the consultants to gain a wider picture of the impact of the Board and whether or not expectations were met.

In total, twenty out of the twenty five Board members used the tools specifically designed for this evaluation. Additional data was gathered from all Board members at the residentials and a ministerial meeting via large and small group activities. The learning gathered is reflected throughout this report but in particular in sections 5.2 and 5.3.

## Stage 5: Attendance at ministerial meetings and residentials

The consultants attended two Ministerial meetings as observers, and carried out a large group exercise at the December meeting using the 'Zapps and Sapps' method to evaluate members' immediate experiences and learning.

The consultants attended two residentials; September 2005 and February 2006, to observe and carry out creative small and large group consultation activities with CYB members, support workers, parents and carers.

### 3.4 Reflections on the evaluation process

Summarised below are a number of important reflections that arose during the life of the evaluation (September 2005-March 2006). The consultants believe that these lessons could be useful to any future independent evaluation team.

The consultants were commissioned in late September 2005, which was five months into the life of the Board. This had several implications; it was difficult for the consultants to gather a true baseline for the assessment of individual Board members skills and personal development aspirations, and the consultants were not able to directly observe early stages of planning and development, including the recruitment process, the first residential and Ministerial meeting. In addition, the consultants had hoped to fully involve children and young people in defining the key questions and methodology for this evaluation. This was limited in scope primarily due to a lack of time allocated within the evaluation budget and very tight timescales for the work. Finally, there were limited opportunities and scope for the consultants to work 'hands-on' with the Board at Ministerial meetings and residentials, also due to lack of time and full agenda. The consultants devised the 'toolkit' discussed above to alleviate these issues.

The Children and Youth Board is a complex project to evaluate. This is in part due to there being three key agencies working in partnership, as well as a range of other stakeholders including children and young people. Many stakeholders described this complexity within their interviews and questionnaires. They communicated an awareness of a range of views, perspectives or 'truth's' in relation to the project. A huge amount of data was generated in the process of seeking to understand the various perspectives. This report aims to represent all the perspectives and the depth of insight gained through the evaluation process. The consultants have attempted to reflect all these perspectives within an analysis of 'what actually happened' and the overall assessment of success or otherwise.

Consequently, this report is lengthy and the detail presented in each section is therefore not re-presented in the overall recommendations. The consultants have identified the key 'big picture' strategic recommendations, based on this detailed evaluation, in order to suggest a clear way forward for the future of the Children and Youth Board. Key ideas that are not reiterated in the key recommendations are bolded in the body of the report.

## 4. Contextualising the 2005 - 2006 DfES Children and Youth Board

### Introduction

This section aims to set a context for the report by giving a brief overview of the foundational elements and early planning processes in the development of the 2005 - 2006 DfES Children and Youth Board. It begins by setting out the 'lessons learned' from the previous CYB Independent Evaluation Report 2004 - 2005 (Harry Reid – 'Proof of the Pudding' 19/04/05) and then summarises information from a range of documents created to develop the current years' pilot.

A brief 'snapshot' is given of what was envisaged from the outset of the 2005-6 pilot; the original vision, strategies, operational and management structures. The consultants feel that this provides an important context for this evaluation and provides a benchmark against which to judge the success or otherwise of this, the second year of a two-year pilot project.

It needs to be stated that it was recognised by all partners that this pilot project would develop and change overtime and would be an 'organic and developmental' process throughout 2005-6. It was anticipated that the Board would play a vital role in discussing and deciding the policy areas they wished to work on for the year ahead. This was intended to mirror good practice guidelines for children and young people's active participation in decision-making.

Contextual information has been drawn from the partnership agreement between NCB and BYC (October 2005), and the document entitled 'Roles and Responsibilities', which outlines agreed responsibilities and boundaries for each significant stakeholder grouping in the project.

### 4.1 The 2004 – 5 Children and Youth Board Evaluation – 'Lessons Learned'

The 'lessons learned' from the previous years' evaluation provide an important context for this years evaluation. These lessons, described below, were intended 'to inform the structure, processes and management of any follow-on initiative' and it is assumed that they would have informed the development of this years Board:

- A very tight timescale created a range of pressures on the developmental process for the Board as well as the contracted agency (Children's Express), which at times compromised participation principles for all stakeholders.
- The success of the CYB's involvement in the recruitment of the Children's Commissioner should lead the DfES to think about this as a model for recruitment of future public appointments.
- The CYB's participation in policy development should be tracked within and by the DfES to assess the significant inputs, actions, events, forces and interactions that shaped policy – this could be carried out via case

study development. This would also enable the Board members to be able to chart 'the impact of their inputs'.

- A longitudinal evaluation approach should be taken to gain the views of significant adults within the lives of the Board members to enable a better picture of members' growth in confidence levels and the catalyst effect the board has on their lives.
- The DfES themselves need to 'devise a greater clarity of goals, roles and performance indicators for future partners contracted to deliver or facilitate initiatives' and that the pilot has impressed upon them the importance of early and clear two way communication with partners... in an initiative such as the CYB.
- The DfES acknowledged 'the large time investment required to nurture meaningful participation by children and young people' and that 'for the successor follow on initiative to reach maximum effectiveness it is recommended that at the outset the DfES sets aside time to thrash out face to face with its new partners exactly what the roles and responsibilities of all parties are; what the philosophy and tone of the initiative is; what characterises 'participation' as opposed to consultation and what each party can legitimately expect of the other. Also care needs to be taken not to let internal disagreements get in the way of the work and that presenting a united view is necessary to reinforce the clarity of roles and responsibilities.'
- The follow on initiative must make 'the deal' in terms of possibilities and constraints very clear to participants, otherwise unrealistic expectations will undermine real progress made.'

These seven key lessons have been reflected on by the consultants and referred to in the final section of this report.

## 4.2 The DfES Children and Youth Board 2005 – 2006. What was envisaged?

The overall aim of the DfES investment in a Children and Youth Board (as it was originally titled, based on the partners' recommendation) was stated as;

'To demonstrate that the involvement of children and young people within the very heart of Government is valuable and achievable. '

Importantly, it was recognised that this vision would 'require learning among officials, Ministers and young people.'

The original tender for the operational management of the Board from NCB/BYC made clear that the Board would be attached to the DfES and not NCB/BYC. The DfES was not directly stated as the 'client', but this is inferred from the fact that ownership of the Board is with DfES, and the day-to-day delivery is 'contracted out'.

The tender document states that the members would focus 'their involvement in the department as a reference group'. It was made clear that the Board was not envisaged as a lobbying group. The NCB and BYC in consultation with the DfES renamed the Children and Youth Board to 'sounding board' to 'convey a realistic responsibility to its members' and so as not to 'sound daunting to younger children'. In addition, the original tender was described as a framework for the development of the Board, rather than a plan 'set in stone'. Members of the previous Board were to be involved via a Children and Young People's Advisory group to help and support the recruitment and induction of new Board members, as co-trainers at the first residential and potentially as continuing Board members.

An Expert Resource Group, comprising of voluntary and community sector organisations, was envisaged as an advisory group who would offer expertise in the development of the Board, specifically to widen the recruitment 'net' and support the work throughout the duration of the pilot.

These documents, structures and support mechanisms give a clear sense of a well thought through process and model developed by the partners. The key tasks that the partners wanted to achieve were communicated in detail. Additionally, it was clear at the beginning of the project that the DfES would play an active role, even given it's 'client' status within this 'contracted out' project. This was envisaged as a means of enabling the Board to become fully embedded within DfES working methodologies and not simply a bolt-on mechanism unable to influence the culture of the organisation.

All the following information including the workplan, key tasks of all partners etc is taken directly from the tender document given to the consultants by NCB.

## **Workplan**

### **The overall aims of the partnership (NCB/BYC) were set out as follows:**

To support children and young people's involvement in Government policy relating to children and young people with the following focus:

- a. To identify policy priorities from a range of policy options put before the Board as defined by Ministerial direction and to offer additional policy suggestions to Ministers.
- b. To work with staff at DfES to offer awareness-raising sessions to support their ability to engage with children and young people in policy making.
- c. To advise DfES officials on how children and young people can effectively be included in policy development and policy decisions both within DfES and across Government.
- d. To comment on and give views and opinions to DfES on emerging and existing policy where this is liable to be seriously considered by officials.

Within 'the partnership', NCB is identified as the lead accountable body.

### **The objectives were outlined as follows:**

- To explain and embed an understanding of the political environment in which policy and the investment of public funds takes place. This will include understanding of timetables, decision-making processes and the systems of Government.
- To facilitate an explanation of the current priorities of a new Government and how these may be influenced by children and young people.
- To ensure Board members learn core skills e.g. in communication and presentation, group work, representing the views of others and teamwork.
- To set up systems that will measure the effectiveness of the methods used to engage and involve children and young people.
- To establish systems which ensure that the Board communicates with and is capable of representing the views of younger children and those outside of the Board especially those in receipt of public services and capable of expressing an opinion about them.
- To design and deliver individual learning plans with each Board member.
- To establish the viability of an accreditation of the work of the children and young people involved in such influencing fora and to pilot this with the Board if viable.

- To agree an exit strategy with Board members at the point of set-up.

Objectives were outlined for the active role of the DfES in supporting and ensuring the success of the Board as follows:

- To ensure policymakers involve the Board in policy formation in order that they may advise and shape it at the earliest possible stages.
- To ensure that policymakers are competent and confident in communicating with Board.
- To ensure that policy makers feedback on policy decisions to the Board both when there is evidence of decisions being informed by children and young people's views and opinions as well as when decisions have had to be taken without due reference or in contradiction to the views and opinions of children and young people.

**Additionally, key tasks for DfES officials were outlined as follows:**

- To promote the involvement of children and young people to colleagues within DfES at every opportunity. The Board will support the participation team in achieving this.
- To establish mechanisms to keep up-to-date with emerging policy priorities across DfES and to pass relevant information on emerging policy to NCB/BYC for discussion with the Board.
- To mediate the views and opinions of the Board to DfES colleagues as appropriate and to facilitate meeting with the relevant Ministers as appropriate.

**The overall expected outcomes for the project were stated as follows:**

- Government will be provided with direct access to the voices of children and young people – helping to influence the development of Government policy.
- A diverse group of 25 children and young people, of which up to 30% come from existing Board members – across the UK and including children and young people with special needs.
- Increased involvement of children and young people in government development and implementation.
- Children and young people develop their knowledge and skills on key issues through intensive project work in sub-groups.

- Government officials are better informed about children and young people's views and feel equipped to promote their views throughout their work.
- The profile of children and young people's participation in Government is raised.
- Children and young people's voices are heard within Government.
- Children and young people feel valued by Government, have increased confidence and have developed emotionally, personally and socially.
- Personal and team development plans devised and training delivered to support their continued development.

**Finally, a range of outputs were listed as follows:**

- Outputs from the sub-groups (to be agreed with the children and young people).
- Evaluation report of the 12-month project.
- A summary document co-written by the Board member's detailing the Board's achievement and suggested next steps for Government at the end of the year and beyond.
- The Board's achievements will be celebrated through the production and dissemination of a pack for all participants consisting of a report (in the format that they choose) and the video *conversations with Board members* highlighting the year's events or another multi-media record of their input over the year.

A draft workplan was included in the tender, which documented activities from April 2005 through to March 2006.

**The key tasks envisaged by NCB/BYC in building the Board were as follows:**

- Advertise, recruit and support a group of 25 children and young people (8-18 years old) from across the UK, to form the DfES Board.
- Establish and maintain contact and communications (in the form chosen by Board members) with and amongst the Board.
- Support the Board to identify the issues within the five outcomes of *Every Child Matters* that the Board think are most important for them to consider.
- Investigate, design and deliver personal and team development plans, including training, resources and accreditation for Board members (ASDAN was identified and agreed as the most appropriate accreditation

process by the partners). To deliver on these plans via three residential events (June and September 2005 and Feb 2006).

- To support Board members to organise and run regional events or consultations to obtain children and young people's views on issues related to the Board's/DfES policy work in between the three residential events.
- To support Board members to feedback on key policy areas at three Ministerial Meetings during the pilot.
- To support the Board to prepare messages (including children and young people they represent) to officials which can be transmitted via DfES internal PCTV.
- To support the Board to prepare messages and advice to be presented to DfES officials at a Team Leaders lunchtime seminar-introduced by the Director-General.
- To attend and co-facilitate cross Government sessions with OGD participation leads arranged by the DfES Participation team and/or cross-government teams.
- To work with the Board to ensure they define their views and opinions with regard to policy priorities identified with and by the DfES in forms that officials and Ministers can consider.
- Work with DfES officials to ensure the department's input and involvement within the Board's activities.
- Work with the DfES and supporters to promote the Board's activities, across the DfES and throughout the Children and Young People sector.
- To establish an expert advisory Board of child-centred organisations to support the work of the Board.
- To develop an exit strategy for the Board and a celebration event.

Collectively these documents reflect a commitment from all partners in the early stages of the project to deliver on their individual workplans and to be able to monitor and measure outputs and change together.

### **4.3 Roles and responsibilities of Board stakeholder groupings**

The roles and responsibilities of each stakeholder grouping within the overall project were set out in a very clear document created by the DfES in partnership with NCB and BYC. This document is an excellent example of good practice as it clearly lays out the responsibilities of each stakeholder grouping within the project as well as the boundaries of their input and influence. It reflects that in the early stages of the process all three partners were keen to ensure a co-ordinated delivery and that each perceived the value and input of one another's roles and areas of work. As such, the consultants have reflected on this document throughout the report as it functions as a benchmark against which to measure the quality and impact of each partner's input to the project.

The overall roles as envisaged at the beginning of the project are summarised as follows;

#### **Children & Youth Board - Role:**

- To advise the Minister for Children, Young People, and Families and Department officials on issues that affect children and young people relating to the five outcomes of Every Child Matters.

#### **Department Sponsor Team - Role:**

- To hold overall responsibility for the management of the Board.
- To facilitate the relationship between policy makers, the Minister and the Board, maximising the opportunity for the dialogue between them.

#### **NCB / BYC – the 'Partners' - Role:**

- To manage the operational aspects of the Board.
- To facilitate positive and effective involvement of every Board Member.

#### **DfES Department Sponsor team and the Partners – Joint Role:**

- To develop agenda for Board activities.
- To agree make-up of the Board.
- To maximise the opportunities for Board members to participate within the constraints of working in central government.
- To agree methods for communicating the Board's activities to a wider audience, including the media and (at) external events.

### **Wider Department policy officials - Role:**

- To involve the Board in policy formation in order that they may advise and shape it at the earliest possible stages

### **Expert Resource Group - Role:**

- To support the partner organisation in developing the positive and effective involvement of every Board member.

### **Children and Youth Board Advisory Group - Role:**

- To provide advice to partners on how to help Board members get the most out of their time on the Board and to assist in reviewing and planning Board meetings.

### **Support Workers (staff, parents and carers) - Role:**

- To support Board members to carry out their role between Board meetings and events.

### **Previous Children and Youth Board members - Role:**

- To use their past experience as Board members to assist the partners in the Board's effective operational management

## **4.4 Support for the Board**

In addition to the detailed roles and responsibilities as summarised above, the partners developed a full series of supporting activities, processes and documents to enable the effective development of the Board.

For example, all support workers and adults who were attached to Board members were expected to sign a code of conduct which outlined expectations of their participation and behaviour around Board members (e.g, smoking, drinking, and conflict resolution issues). The partners also created child protection, equal opportunities, risk assessment statements and policies and complaints procedures, which were signed by all adults.

### **Staffing support for the Board**

There does not appear to be an overall definitive 'staffing structure' document which identifies staffing to support each element in the workplan. The consultants have pieced together the following staffing structure and time allocation for the project based on the interviews and questionnaires.

#### **• NCB staffing allocation**

- One operational Board Co-ordinator based in NCB – (initially 4 days per week, but increased to full time during the life of the project) as outlined in the partners' tender document
- 12 days supervision of the Board Co-ordinator and project by the NCB Head of Participation
- Financial management and management of the External Resource Group by the NCB Head of Participation
- Additional time for NCB staff members at each residential event and ministerial meeting, as outlined in the partners' service level agreement

#### **• BYC staffing allocation**

- Two days per week for the Board Administration), as outlined in the partners' tender (split over four days to ensure continuity between partners)
- Twelve days time for BYC management and co-supervision of the project with NCB, and supervision of BYC staff working on the project
- Planning and delivery of residential training events and management of accreditation processes for Board members as outlined in the partners' service level agreement

## • **DfES staffing allocation**

- Overall management of the Board by Head of Children's Views and Interests team
- Co-ordination of DfES role in relation to the Board by two named DfES staff members within Children's Views and Interests Team who report that this area of their work takes at least a day a week
- Additional time for DfES staff members at each residential event and ministerial meeting

## **Training for DfES policy Officials**

It was envisaged that the partners would plan and run training sessions for DfES policy officials in good practice and participative working with children and young people. This is reflected in some of the original aims and objectives of the tender document as well as in the overall roles and responsibilities of the DfES Sponsor Team.

Two successful training workshops were delivered by NCB to raise awareness with DfES officials on the work of the CYB, and support them in developing plans to meaningfully involve the Board. The sessions covered a wide range of issues including participation as a concept, and how to access children and young people's opinions for policy development.

## **Feedback mechanisms**

It was envisaged from the outset that the focus of the Board's feedback to Government would be within the five outcomes of Every Child Matters, and that feedback would come via collation of Board information by NCB to the DfES, either directly to the Policy leads or mediated via the Children's Views and Interests team.

In addition, the Board would meet with the Minister three times over the life of the project.

## **Geographical scope of the Board**

Children and young people from England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales were recruited to the Board. It was felt that the children and young people from the devolved nations would make a very worthwhile and valued contribution to the Board and that they could make contact with their respective youth participation networks, such as 'Funky Dragon', should they want to.

## **Timescale**

The project aimed to start in April 2005 with an end date of March 2006.

## **Media work**

From the outset of the project, it was envisaged that NCB, BYC and the DfES would share responsibility for publicity and promotional activities relating to the Board but that all activities would be 'cleared' with the DfES.

## 5. Key findings

### An overview

This section aims to draw together the consultant's key findings under the following headings:

- Operational and management processes involved in setting up and running the Board
- Board activities
- Impact of the Board:
  - For children and young people
  - On DfES policy and practice
- Managing communications
- The NCB, BYC and DfES working in partnership

Key findings for each of the above areas have been arrived at via a process of:

- Reflection on what was originally envisaged
- Presentation and assessment of what happened from a range of stakeholder perspectives highlighting both achievements and challenges
- Suggested improvements for future practice and any follow on initiative

## 5.1 Operational and management processes involved in setting up and running the Board

### Overview

In this section, the consultants review the following aspects;

- The recruitment process of the Board
- The day to day running of the Board

### The recruitment process of the Board

The original workplan envisaged that this operational task would be carried out by the partners with the aim of recruiting a diverse UK-wide group of members. The Expert Resource Group had a responsibility to aid this task through advertising via their extensive networks.

NCB and BYC worked together using their own networks and contacts across youth organisations to promote this opportunity. Information about the CYB; its aims, a role description, key tasks, time commitment, personal requirements and major events and activities was sent out with an application pack that offered children and young people the opportunity to say more about themselves and why they wanted to be part of the Board. The opportunity was also advertised via specialist magazines for professionals in the field.

This distribution of information about the Board spread far wider than was initially expected by the partners. There was a high level of interest in the CYB as a result:

‘On a daily basis both organisations (BYC and NCB) were inundated with calls asking for more information’.

The placing of a downloadable application form on both organisations websites also assisted with reaching children and young people and facilitating their recruitment.

‘We received in excess of 250 application forms from all over the United Kingdom from many different children and young people. The standard and passion from those that had applied was tremendous’.

A short-listing criteria that gave a fair opportunity to all, regardless of age or experience, was drawn up which ensured that as many different children and young people were recruited as possible. The partners were looking for a good spread in age, gender and experience.

A total of thirty-six children and young people were interviewed in London, Manchester, York and Bristol. The partners reported that involving a young person on each interview panel greatly helped. These panel members came from the NCB Children's Advisory Group and BYC's Board of Trustees and Committee members (all young people), and added another valid perspective and viewpoint to interviews, as well as helping to put interviewees at ease. The interviews were held after school and on weekends in order to ensure that children and young people did not miss school or college.

Children and young people from across the United Kingdom were recruited, based on the original remit for the Board. It was felt by all that the policy areas that the Board would be focussing on would have relevance for all children and young people. It was also agreed that if the Board members from the devolved nations felt that they would like to feed back their findings to their representative groups, such as "Funky Dragon", "Children in Wales", "Scottish Youth Parliament", "Children In Scotland", "NICCY" and "NIYF" , that this would be actively encouraged.

The recruitment process was run on a very tight timescale. All the short listing and interviews were held in time to enable the first residential to take place in May 2005, and to adhere to DfES Ministerial and policy development commitments and timescales. The timing of the first residential was affected by the need to have a meeting with the Minister before the summer break. This put pressure on the partners' staff and the Board members to achieve a great deal in a short time.

## **Key findings**

The recruitment process was well planned and executed, which is backed up by members who identified the interview as a key highlight in their experience of the Board, as well as a very low drop-out rate throughout the year. The paperwork that was created to back-up the recruitment processes was also exemplary and could be utilised for any follow-on initiative.

The partners successfully raised the profile of the Board via an expansive network of organisations resulting in a high interest among children and young people. More children and young people may have been informed about this opportunity if other channels such as via schools and colleges were utilised.

A number of staff commented on the short timescales available for recruitment. In practice, one staff member managed the shortlisting process. There was perhaps an over reliance on this staff members personal commitment and good will, which is not sustainable in the long run.

The diversity of applicants in terms of age range, educational ability, race, gender and background provides evidence of a successful recruitment process. The

resulting Board was referred to by all stakeholders as 'exemplary' in terms of its diversity.

### **Improvements for future practice**

- Recruitment is absolutely key to the success of the project and therefore all stakeholders believe that it should be carried out over a longer period of time, with a staff team (from all partners) dedicated to this aspect of the project and working to involve children and young people in each step of the process. Recruitment forms part of the preparation for the Board and should have at least a three month lead in ahead of the project delivery.
- It would be advantageous to involve previous members of the CYB in future recruitment. Past members should be enabled to use their expertise in publicising, shortlisting and choosing new members. The current members have expressed an interest in this level of involvement.
- The DfES need to think about the focus of the CYB for the future and decide whether it will be UK wide or not. One model recommended is to focus on England as DfES policies have most affect here, but the scope of the recruitment then needs to mirror this. If it continues to have a UK wide focus then mechanisms need to be developed that link Board members to their own nations' youth participation networks and bodies – such as 'Funky Dragon' in Wales.

## **Managing the day-to-day running of the Board**

The day-to-day running of the Board was managed by NCB and BYC with a complex distribution of roles and tasks based on the strengths and skill sets of partners.

The Board Co-ordinator, based at NCB (originally on four days a week, increased to full time in the last few remaining months of the project) was directly responsible for all day-to-day support and contact with the Board, co-ordinating residentials, regional work and ministerial meetings.

In addition, this staff member was responsible for recruitment, liaison and support for all adult 'support staff, parents and carers'. It was originally envisaged that all Board members would have paid sessional support workers and/or parents/carers. Critically, it was envisaged that these adults would pick up the majority of the day-to-day support and work locally to enable each young person to effectively carry out their roles as Board members between meetings and events.

Importantly, the Co-ordinator's role also became critical to the two-way flow of information between the Board and the DfES.

BYC took a lead role in three key areas; administrative support, training development, design of residentials, and accreditation and personal development of the Board members.

Administration was carried out by an existing BYC member of staff (two days equivalent) over four days in order to fully meet their commitment and to enable effective partnership working with NCB. This role included creating and maintaining database information on CYB members and support workers, organising logistics (travelling and accommodation) for residentials and ministerial meetings and finally ensuring that Board members had all the information they needed for such meetings.

One staff member from each organisation had overall responsibility for managing communications between the partners, management of project staff within their own organisation as well as overall budgetary responsibility for their areas of the work plan. All staff members from both organisations were involved in supporting Ministerial meetings and residentials to deliver specific areas of work.

The strengths and skill sets of NCB were perceived as; greater experience in policy aspects; greater links and liaison with DfES; experience of participation work with the younger age range (8-16 year olds) and facilitation of advisory groups.

BYC's strengths and skill sets were perceived as; training expertise; a UK wide remit and in depth experience of participation work with older young people. It was believed that the independence and expertise of these two organisations, working in partnership, would give a more 'credible' face to the Board within the DfES than one that might be run 'in-house'.

'Being able to utilise the expertise of the central working team from both BYC and NCB has meant better outcomes for the Board. It has been great to draw on each other's skills in specific areas'.

Although the DfES 'contracted out' the day to day running of the Board to the partners, it was understood by the consultants (via interviews and scrutiny of the early set-up documents) that the DfES had an important role to play in supporting the day-to-day work of the Board, by 'creating the conditions' within the Department for the Board to be successful. This was originally envisaged as supporting policy makers in their learning about participation, helping these policy leads to write consultation documents (for the Board to work on) in child friendly language, and having an input to agendas for residential and Ministerial meetings.

It was originally envisaged that children and young people would be involved in the setting up, running and decision-making operational aspects of the Board. Children and young people were involved in the recruitment process, but beyond this it seems that the operational management processes have been largely defined and managed by the adults in the partnership.

The Expert Resource Group was envisaged as having a key role in supporting the day-to-day running of the Board and the effective involvement of Board members. Specific responsibilities included aiding recruitment, advising project staff on good practice, supplying cheaper venues for regional work and assisting children and young people's consultation and regional work between Board meetings. In addition, the DfES had originally felt that the Expert Resource Group could have provided a link between the Board and the Government Offices of the regions.

## **Key Findings**

Even though there was a complex distribution of roles and tasks between the two partner organisations, all staff have given 100% commitment and energy to the day-to-day running of the Board. More is reported about the partnership work later in this section.

Consistent feedback from children and young people and other stakeholders confirms that the Board Co-ordinator has been a key player in ensuring the successful and on-going involvement of children and young people. All speak very highly of her support and personal engagement in the project.

All staff reported that the quantity of the work and associated time pressures with day-to-day management were 'extreme' at different times of the year. The coordination of the Board by only one staff member was in excess of one full time post. This was also reflected in the allocation of time for the administrator. For each member of staff time to support the Board was in addition to existing work responsibilities in their respective organisations. The Board Co-ordinator's post was the only one dedicated full time to this work. All stakeholders report that not

enough time was allocated to these key roles. Children and young people themselves, as well as support workers said that although the co-ordinator was always available to answer calls and give support, etc. they felt at times they didn't want to burden her with more requests. While this is very respectful, it has to be said that it is not an ideal situation for all parties involved.

The levels of input by support workers/parents and carers, was found to be quite inconsistent. This factor had a critical effect on the amount of work left to the Board Co-ordinator and Administrator in the daily management of the Board.

Some members had limited, if any support, which put the burden on the Board Co-ordinator to offer this role via the telephone and email. For other children and young people there was a significant reliance on parents and carers for both planning and carrying out regional work, day-to-day support and getting to and from Board activities. Although a payment policy was drawn up that clearly laid out what amounts could be claimed for as well as a roles and responsibility form given to all support workers/parents and carers, there appeared to be a lack of clarity about their entitlement to funding. Some parents chose not to take it, although train fares were reimbursed. The fact that some people in this supporting role changed over the lifetime of the project may help to explain this confusion. In addition, parents expressed a difficulty in booking time off work in order to attend Board activities, which was exacerbated by the limited notice of the dates of ministerial meetings.

Feedback from support workers/parents and carers also suggests that they were not always sure of their role and what was expected of them in terms of responsibility for out of training times or supporting children and young people within sessions at residentials, even though this was contained in documents describing their roles and responsibilities. Methods used by the partners included individual training given to support workers about their role and that of the Board at the first residential. All support workers were asked to sign a service level agreement that clearly laid out their role and expectations for the children and young people they were supporting. This highlights a need to constantly re-emphasise roles and expectations and to check with people that they understand this throughout the life of the project. The lack of clarity was also reflected in feedback from project staff who felt that support workers at times treated the residentials as 'holidays or child minding sessions'. One staff member reported:

'They do not take on the responsibility of ensuring that the young people are in their rooms or fully support the young people to realise the extent of their work or the opportunities attached to it'.

Support workers/parents and carers felt that more clarity around expectations of both children and young people and themselves regarding regional work would have been helpful. In particular, where children and young people were not connected in locally to youth projects or fora etc, the call on the support staff and parents/carers was much greater.

The lack of local support in some cases was accompanied by the problematic nature of contacting Board members day to day. Whilst a variety of methods were employed by project staff; email, phone and letter, the direct communication via phone proved to be the most effective as the majority of children and young people did not have easy access to the internet. This involved calling 25 different children and young people, plus additional calls to parents, carers or support workers, many of whom were not contactable during working hours. This proved to be very time consuming and at times frustrating for staff.

In addition, the diversity of the Board and the range of individuals differing needs created some tensions for staff given time pressures. For example, the wide age range alone presented some challenges;

“This has meant that the working team as a whole has had to be more continuous in making everything suitable for the lowest age group; some policy areas do not lend themselves to this easily”.

The consultants picked up on a complex dynamic created by having to work to externally set deadlines within time pressures while at the same time managing to meet the day-to-day individual support needs and abilities of a diverse group. Project staff had to manage this dynamic and ensure that all Board members felt equally informed, able and confident to engage with their responsibilities. Every aspect of the Board had to successfully engage the imaginations and abilities of all the children and young people in the group and therefore meet the wide range of different needs and experiences.

“Being flexible to meet their needs, but not having the person power created a tension for the partnerships”.

There were a number of tensions relating to day-to-day communication between the partners and authority of decision-making. This was in part due to the four key members of staff being sited in two different buildings and led to some lack of clarity around roles and responsibilities for day-to-day tasks relating to supporting, communicating with and administering the Board. Additionally, it was difficult for the Board Co-ordinator to always keep abreast of the actual support that individual Board members were receiving from specific staff.

Although the Board activities were very well co-ordinated, timings and dates were not always set in good time for children and young people, and in particular parents, to plan and make necessary arrangements. For example, children, young people and parents reported that they were unclear at the beginning about the expected commitment and dates for all meetings and residential. This was the case even though an outline of the commitment was included in the background information and covered at the first residential. It is important to note that many of the difficulties around dates and times arose because the DfES were not always easily able to assign dates and times for Ministerial meetings as well as the fact that different areas of the UK have different school holidays.

These issues are inevitable within partnership working, however it appears that although frequent meetings were held between partners to discuss up and coming and future work as well as staff debriefs following each event, more time needs to be allocated by the partners to check on progress, whether expectations of each partner are being met and to ensure absolutely clear communication on all practice matters.

The day to day running of the Board was also affected by the consistency of DfES staffing for the project throughout the year. It appears that their ability to commit the necessary time to this project was reduced which meant that some of the day-to-day contact with policy leads (that should have been carried out by the DfES) was actually carried by the NCB staff directly. In particular, there was a gap of approximately four months within the DfES Children's Views and Interests Team of a named Lead staff member for the NCB to directly liaise with on detailed information. During this time two other DfES staff provided day to day contact.

The Expert Resource Group appears not to have met during the life of the project although attempts were made to pull this group together on a number of occasions. Feedback from the partners states that the Expert Resource Group were instrumental within the recruitment of the Board by advertising via their networks and for offering regional contacts for regional work. As the project developed the partners felt they had most of the resources they needed within their own units and so had limited need for input from this group.

### **Improvements for future practice**

- Ongoing time needs to be dedicated to partnership building and reflecting on working methods and achievements. The service level agreement should be regularly reviewed in an open and transparent way to ensure that each partner perceives the value and achievements in each others areas of the work, and outcomes are measured and challenges identified. Even if all partners are satisfied with progress, it is still necessary to check in with each other and keep track in order to adjust workplans, targets or roles if necessary.
- Adequate time needs to be allocated to the set up, day to day running of the Board and key tasks. Clarity is needed around responsibility for each task and for decision-making.
- At least 2 full time staff members are needed to co-ordinate and support a Board of this size, scope and remit. The split of tasks would need to be identified, however, one staff member could have overall Board member co-ordination responsibility and one could have Board development responsibilities that directly relate to regional work, local support and DfES policy development functions. This scale of operations is the minimum needed if the Board is to stay within the age range already decided. These staff members need to be sited in the same office. This may help deliver other key elements of the project such as the Expert Resource Group and recruitment and development of support workers/parents and carers.

- In addition there should be a full time administrative post with responsibility for all databases, logistical arrangements, booking of venues etc, sited within the same office as the co-ordinating staff suggested above.
- The DfES should think about its own level of staffing in relation to this project. A full time member of staff (solely working with the Board) would ensure that the DfES has adequate time and capacity to work alongside partners to carry out the necessary tasks aimed at building culture and context to ensure the Board has a real impact on decision making. This staff member would also ensure the engagement of senior officials and policy leads within the DfES in the project.
- The role of the support workers, parents and carers needs to be reviewed. A network of externally recruited and paid support staff could be better utilised to do the local day-to-day support of Board members. A dedicated person specification asking for in depth knowledge and experience of working with children and young people and participation initiatives would be useful. A primary role would be to enable any Board member, regardless of their previous experience, to engage with the local, regional and national work of the Board. Parents and carers should remain a part of the local support function with training for all to enable them to effectively support their children and young people.
- The day-to-day preferred methods of communication with Board members by partners should be reviewed as the project progresses. In the initial set up the Board members placed mobile phone/text messaging as a low priority. However, once relationships had been established more members may have been assisted by a web based texting service. This should be explored for the future.
- Better use of IT would enable members to share their on-going experiences as they carry out their work regionally. A dedicated area within the partners or DfES website could be established where members can access all the necessary template documents they require as well as submit feedback on their activities. The Board Co-ordinator and DfES staff could check in with members on a regular basis, problems could be voiced and local support needs identified and monitored more easily via such a tool. It should be remembered, however, that not all children and young people will have easy access to the Internet, however local youth support networks could be harnessed to ensure that excluded children and young people can access these technologies and utilise them.
- Support workers and Board members particularly identified the need for a set of coherent information templates explaining the purpose of the Board, its aims, how regional work fits with the Board's responsibilities, the policy areas the Board is consulting on and why, the connection with the DfES and example questionnaires etc. Board members had this paperwork in their Board files, and support workers received individual training sessions about their role and how they were to help Board members with regional work. However, members found it difficult at times to explain their work to adult 'gate-keepers' at the local level. A clear set of paper work would perhaps reduce reliance on support

workers to initiate both this contact and to create documents explaining the Board. More regular sessions with support workers to highlight their role or a higher number of dedicated support workers may help in the future.

- Current Board members would certainly welcome more involvement with deciding when and where residential meetings are held, as well as defining the formal processes and the agenda for the ministerial meetings. It is not surprising that this was very limited, given that it is only the second year of a pilot and there have been two different lead organisations for each of those years. Continuity in the lead organisation and in staff building relationships and trust over time with Board members would greatly increase the potential for children and young people's future active involvement in day-to-day management.
- Board members reported that they would very much like opportunities to meet more frequently (regionally and nationally) and this is picked up later in the report. An additional suggestion from the partners is that satellite groups of children and young people could meet to work on policy and feedback to policy officials and the Minister.
- The Expert Resource Group should be reviewed as a supporting structure and reinstated for a new Board. The commitment and interests from member organisations should be made very clear, with distinct roles and responsibilities around assisting with structures and mechanisms for Board consultation activities and regional work. It is perhaps also worth reflecting on 'what's in it for them' in terms of galvanising their input, given that all organisations have great demands on their time.

## 5.2. Board Activities

### Overview

In this section, the consultants evaluate three key Board activities:

- Residentials
- Ministerial meetings
- Policy/Regional work

The consultants have focussed here on children and young people's feedback and presented the results as case studies using quotes to illustrate their findings.

### Residentials

The original Board set-up documents state that the partners would deliver key training and planning events for new Board members over the course of the project. These events were a means of enabling the Board to learn about their roles and responsibilities, understand the DfES and its' policy priorities, carry out the planning for regional work and develop the necessary skills to fulfil their Board membership.

The training and planning events took shape as three residentials all of which aimed to achieve a number of set outcomes and outputs with the Board. Very detailed training programmes were created for each residential by the partners, which were attended by all project staff from BYC and NCB. In most cases, children and young people were accompanied by their support worker, parent or carer.

#### Residential 1: 4-5 June 2005, London

The first residential aimed to enable Board members to fully understand their role and responsibility, create the CYB plans and priorities for the year and introduce members to each other and the Board partners. In addition, the residential intended to increase children and young people's knowledge of how the DfES works and how the department would impact on the Board's work. As part of the above process work took place with the Board to identify their personal and team development needs and strengths. Training plans were drawn and ground rules were established to ensure the group worked well together for the year ahead.

At this residential each member received a Board file containing information about their role, the partners, member personal profiles, and a paper presentation on a 'day in the life of a DfES official'. Training was also given on organising activities locally. Information about policy presented at this residential enabled the Board to decide their initial top five priority areas to work on;

- Improving school behaviour
- Youth Green Paper
- Anti social behaviour
- The EC Directive on participation
- School attendance and admission

These policy areas changed over the life of the project. See later for the actual areas worked on.

Sessions were also run for support workers to discuss their expectations, roles and responsibilities and how they could best support the child or young person on the Board. A session was also held on supporting children and young people to undertake regional work.

The consultants had not been commissioned at this point, however NCB and BYC evaluated this residential with twelve Board members. Eleven said they 'enjoyed' the residential, and seven 'learnt enough about their role on the Board'. Board members also reported that they enjoyed meeting new people, taking part in the activities, learning about their role and the DfES. Board members felt that some logistical issues needed attention which included; travel, more time, and organisation of social activities.

## **Residential 2: 23-24 September 2005, Manchester**

The second residential aimed to recap on learning from the previous residential, and to ensure that members developed a greater understanding of regional work and the policy areas to focus on. It was also intended that members would develop their personal and team skills, learn about the ASDAN accreditation programme and the process of keeping a record of their work. Board members were provided with a series of 'top tips' information sheets based on the results from their training surveys.

The consultants were able to carry out evaluation activities with Board members during their lunch break. This was the first meeting with members and the following evaluation questions were explored using a range of creative activities; 'One thing I want to achieve for me while I am part of the Board', 'One thing I really want us to achieve as a Board', 'Remembering back – tell us one reason why you applied to be on the Board', 'One new skill or thing I have learned since I joined the Board', and 'One thing I have not enjoyed so far'.

The partners evaluated the second residential with twenty-one Board members, eighteen of which felt the residential was fun and very informative. At this stage three quarters of those completing evaluation forms felt happy and able to start their regional work. This is reflected in feedback in which members reported enjoying the regional work training sessions, anti bullying policy work, learning about and debating policies.

Areas for improvement included more time and less recapping. Some members identified their support needs at this stage via the consultants 'reflection' sheets which included: more ideas for regional activities and help with time management and organising events. These needs were subsequently picked up by partnership staff either by telephone, email or at the next residential.

### **Residential 3: 16-17 February 2006, Leicester**

The third residential aimed to develop Board members skills relating to their regional work and share feedback about this work. In addition, the event aimed to look at additional policy areas, develop ideas and planning for the final celebration event and Board Report and carry out exit interviews to enable members to comment on their experience of Board involvement, and to measure the effectiveness of their personal and team development plans.

The consultants worked with sixteen children and young people at this event to focus on their concrete ideas for improvements to the CYB. Members discussed the methods used in their regional work, what made regional work challenging and shared their ideas about what would help in the future.

### **Key Findings**

The partners have been extremely successful in both creating a sense of 'a Board' and of 'belonging to a Board' in very short periods of time during the three residential events. In addition to developing this sense of belonging, the partners were highly effective in equipping members with the necessary skills to participate; informing them about Government and policy and assisting them in planning regional work and reporting back on results. The partners have achieved excellent results for everyone involved. Board members consistently reported that the residential were one of the highlights of their year.

The partners successfully achieved a balance between meeting the needs of the DfES for the Board to consider specific policy areas while at the same time focussing on the developmental needs of individuals on the Board. Key project staff, such as the Board Co-ordinator and the lead BYC staff member have shown a huge commitment to understanding the particular individual needs, skills and abilities of a very diverse group, supporting those needs and enabling the members to gather genuinely useful and interesting feedback from their regions.

The residential provided children and young people with well planned and executed opportunities for personal and skill development. Personal development plans were created with each Board member outlining what skills they wanted to develop during their time on the Board. Collectively the development plans were used to define the training programmes and so were excellently tailored. Members' feedback substantiates the fact that the Board have received excellent training in core skills, as well as information about how Government works and how policy decisions are made.

The Board received written information and training input to back up their learning on a wide range of skill areas such as:

- Conflict resolution
- Personal confidence
- Chairing meetings
- Children's rights
- Listening skills
- Obtaining others views
- Planning events
- Presentation skills
- Time management
- Using the media
- Meeting skills
- Identifying contacts

Board members enjoyed learning about the DfES and in particular, how the Boards' work was making a difference. They very much appreciated the attendance of DfES policy leads at the events as this made the whole experience real and joined-up.

There is evidence to suggest that the expectation of what could be achieved at residentials was overly ambitious. Both Board members and staff seemed at times to struggle to get through all the items on the programmes. From observation and feedback from children and young people at two residentials the consultants identified a lack of clarity amongst some and their support workers about expectations of regional work and how to achieve it.

The consultants observed that at times the staff were under relentless pressure to get through a very full agenda. Limited training input from other agencies (accessed via the Expert Resource Group as originally envisaged) may also have affected the partners' ability to utilise a wider range of creative approaches to sustain participation by all Board members. At times, member's concentration lapsed and some spoke about being very tired and a bit overwhelmed with the pace of the events.

The methods used at residentials to engage children and young people, such as small group work, games and icebreakers, were successful. However, more consideration could be given to training methods that are less reliant on reading and writing, and that engage with a wider variety of learning styles using more creative ideas and activities (imagery, colour, role play and drama etc). This might ensure that the differing needs and abilities of a diverse group are consistently engaged and motivated.

“Lots of activities have involved writing on big sheets of paper and reporting back which gets repetitive and boring”.

Board members also reported that constant recapping and evaluation at residential, although important, took time out of getting on with the other activities. Whilst reflection and evaluation is ‘useful to embed learning’ (particularly for younger members), at times there was ‘too much’. Given that the consultants were also carrying out evaluation at two residential it is easy to see how it could feel a bit overwhelming. Some Board members suggested that skills training could be delivered regionally to small groups leaving the residential for planning their regional work and learning about policy issues.

Timings of meetings was a significant issue for both Board members and support workers parents and carers. It is acknowledged that no one solution will meet everyone’s needs, however some Board members were concerned about the impact of missing out on school work. Tight timings at residential posed some problems for children and young people with disabilities who needed more time to get ready or eat.

Travel arrangements were an issue for members who had to travel furthest and this was reported as contributing to their tiredness at events.

Finally, for most Board members the contact with other members was restricted to residential and ministerial meetings. They consistently reported that more face-to-face contact between meetings with others in their regions would help in carrying out regional work.

Evaluation of each residential demonstrates that they improved over time as feedback from participants informed the organic development of practice. The huge success of the regional work ultimately stands as a testament to the fact that most of the Board members enjoyed their residential and were successfully engaged and prepared to carry out their responsibilities.

## **Improvements for future practice**

Some markers are given above to support improvements to the residential and these should be read in conjunction with the following suggestions;

- It is vital that a year plan is made early on in the Board set-up phase and that information regarding Board activities and the programme of events is available in advance for support workers, parents, carers and members.
- It is imperative that the DfES give information of and about key dates well in advance so that children and young people can be informed. Provision of timely information relating to policy areas will ensure that a variety of creative methods can be utilised.

- Greater clarity about boundaries and roles and expectations of support workers, parents and carers is needed.
- Residentials over more days or more opportunities for meetings in the regions would reduce pressures around very full agenda's and lack of time. This would also enable on-going contact between members and support effective planning of regional work and peer support.
- Input to residentials from a range of external trainers using different approaches might help to engage all members of a diverse Board as well as take the pressure off the project staff.
- Well planned social events need to be specific to the age ranges of the members.

## **Ministerial meetings**

A key role for the CYB was envisaged as advising the Minister for Children, Young People and Families, as well as Department officials on issues that affect children and young people. The Ministerial meetings were the means by which the Board would fulfil this role directly via offering feedback on views gathered in their regional work as well as progress made by the Board.

The original 'roles and responsibilities' document identifies a key role for the DfES to mediate the views and opinions of the Board to Department officials, and to identify specific times for the Board to meet with the Minister. All three partners were envisaged as developing the agenda for Board activities, and NCB and BYC had the lead role in managing the expectations of Board members around their involvement in shaping policy and maximising their contributions.

As discussed later in the section on 'Impact of the Board', it is clear that the meetings with the Minister were a particular highlight for members and not surprisingly it was this element of their work that made many feel they were making a difference to government and getting their voices heard. Meeting the Minister gave many Board members the sense that their work was especially valid and important. These meetings were one of six key significant elements that made the Board successful for members and these elements are discussed later in this section.

## **Key findings**

There were three Ministerial meetings over the duration of the project. The consultants were present at the second and last meeting.

The partners organised a full day of activities for each of the Ministerial meetings, including a social activity as well as time to plan and prepare. At the second Ministerial meeting, for example, preparation included identifying key information to feedback on "Improving School Behaviour", "Anti Social Behaviour – the Respect Action Plan" and "Youth Green Paper". The Board also decided that they wanted to co-chair this meeting to make it more 'young person friendly'.

The consultants were allocated time with members directly after the second Ministerial meeting. The consultants used the 'Zapps and Sapps' method to find out what had made Board members happy or positive and sad or negative in relation to the Ministerial meeting. Nineteen Board members participated and their feedback is presented here.

Board members reported a positive well-organised meeting, with opportunities to share their views on all their work with the Minister. Many found the Minister attentive; 'she really listened' to them and understood what they thought. Some felt they were able to ask 'real questions' and got 'real answers'. One member said, 'there was no avoidance by the Minister'.

Members gave specific feedback about why this meeting with the Minister was positive:

"The minister really listened to us and she understood what we thought – because she never really said we were wrong and she really listened"

"Hearing that they will re-look at the Green Paper, taking our opinions seriously, wanting to hear what we have done, seeing the minister again – encouraging– very encouraging on all our work"

"The minister walked around and talked to us individually – it made me feel very good – because it meant she was interested in me as a person, rather than just part of the CYB".

Members enjoyed seeing how passionate other members got about the issues they discussed. Many felt they were able to be open with what they thought and could join in and make their contributions. They were left feeling positive and happy, if a little tired.

"I felt I tried to be part of the group and I made my voice heard and people agreed with my ideas"

"Most of us spoke and some good points came out. When I spoke I felt Bev was listening and she smiled at me".

"I was able to say some of my ideas confidently and I even disagreed with the Minister and voiced my opinion. After the first 'aah I don't know what to say' I got over it and used personal experiences to try and convince the Minister of my points"

Members identified issues around limited time as less positive. The formal structure of the meeting meant for some that 'not everything was discussed' and not everyone got an opportunity to speak.

Some members reported being less sure about whether they were really listened to or if everyone got their point across. In particular, there was a concern by some

about the impact of their work. Many were unclear about what would happen after the meeting and whether their ideas would be acted on.

“I felt that she may be just nodding and smiling and was not going to act on the ideas – we only talked about some topics – she didn’t say what she would do with the ideas or what would happen to them. We should have been able to suggest what we think the DfES should focus on and what is important to us i.e. school uniform, student school governors etc”.

“Wondering whether our comments will be acted on – is this group making a difference and if it is – can we see evidence?”

“When we meet next or at some point I would like to know what changes are going to be made – next meeting I would like the chance of asking the minister questions”.

Unfortunately, three members were concerned about being filmed in the meeting which had a negative impact on their experience.

Board members reported on their learning from the meeting as being primarily about themselves and other members including; how to act in meetings, how to put views across effectively, how to help each other to feedback and how to chair meetings.

The consultants observed in two meetings that the fairly formal Board style approach had an impact both on quality and quantity of communication. The consultants specifically observed a ‘gap’ between the Board and the Minister. This ‘gap’ was not in the physical sense, but rather something more akin to a gap in knowledge and familiarity. As the Board exists primarily for the Minister’s benefit the consultants feel that more time could be allocated to the Minister and the Board getting to know each other. Greater impact would be experienced by the Minister in the dedication of time to such a process.

At times, the Minister seemed to be in the ‘hot seat’, having to answer questions from the Board relating to children and young people which may have felt a little adversarial. This could be helped by working in small groups rather than the ‘round table Board meeting approach’ enabling the members, Minister and officials to get to know each other, create stronger working relationships and engage in more dialogue.

In both meetings, the consultants observed that at least five members did not speak and it tended to be the more confident members that spoke up and often. The consultants suggest that a facilitator role as well as a chairing role may help to maximise participation and create an equal playing field. This approach may go further in challenging an adult-centred culture and have a greater impact on bringing about a culture of participation.

## **Improvements for future practice:**

- Longer meetings with more breaks between items.
- The Board and Minister could spend time together to discuss and clarify the purpose of the meetings and how to run them in a way that will be effective for all Board members.
- A child or young person chairing and another helping people to speak who may be quieter.
- A more creative and fun meeting environment using ice breakers, energisers, small round table discussions where officials and Ministers move around and get to know the members more personally.
- More varied opportunities to get to know the Minister and find out her opinions.
- More thought needs to be given to how the Board will feedback to the Minister – less flip charted bullet points and more concrete recommendations.
- More thought needs to be given to feeding back to the Board. This would give members a better sense of their impact; where their views are taken and what does or does not happen as a result of Ministerial meetings.
- There may be a role for the Board in providing training to the Minister and officials on how to improve the meetings, and how to engage children and young people.
- Holding ministerial meetings in the space created by Board members in their preparation meeting would enable the Minister to meet children and young people 'on their own territory', rather than the Board being moved to a more formal, adult space.

## Policy/Regional Work

The main purpose of the regional work was to enable Board members to find out the views and opinions of a wider cross section and number of children and young people about specific policy areas. Throughout the project, the development of regional work was an organic learning process for each member as well as for the partners and the DfES.

The actual work that was carried out regionally focussed on the following policy areas:

- Improving school behaviour
- Youth offending
- Anti social behaviour, The Respect Action plan
- Youth Green Paper

## Key findings

In order to prepare children and young people for regional work, the Board members first reflected on their own views in relation to the policy areas via group discussion and questionnaires at residential. In addition, children and young people gave their feedback in between the residentials to questionnaires cascaded from the DfES via the Board Co-ordinator.

The range of methods that the Board used to carry out their regional work was very impressive considering the timescale and other commitments that members reported. The consultants held a large group interview at the final residential involving sixteen members of the Board. The following gives a snapshot of the range of methods used and the numbers utilising them:

Method used	Numbers using this method
Use of websites to contact other groups	1
Graffiti Board	1
Tape-recorded focus group	1
1 person built a website	1
Use of chat forums	2
Drama workshops	2
Consultation events	3
Email discussions	4
Leaflets, posters,	4

newsletter	
Face to face talks with peers	5
Focus groups	6
Random chats at lunchtime	6
Group discussions	6
Visits to others groups, schools or organisations	11
Questionnaires	13

Overall, the reach and range of work completed was very impressive. Only three children and young people did not manage to formally carry out regional work, but instead asked opinions of friends informally. The degree to which they had support locally seems to have been a key to the success or otherwise of the regional work, hence the critical importance of making local support structures work effectively.

Some Board members used their scrapbooks and reflection sheets to describe their regional work. The consultants have created case studies from this feedback which effectively demonstrates the 'highs and lows' of this work. The case studies demonstrate the need for a wide range of support structures and adults to enable members to carry out regional work. The amount of work that the Board members undertook to prepare for and carry out their consultations is very clear.

## Case studies

### Jamie Leigh

Jamie Leigh from Middlesbrough was 8 when she joined the Board, hearing about it from her big sister. She hoped to 'help other children' by being involved. Jamie Lee's regional work involved visiting her school and consulting with 25 children aged 7-11 years.

She was supported by her mum who helped with typing, organising and explaining the purpose of meetings to teachers. Lucy Read from NCB and Susie Reilly from BYC helped by email and phone. Jamie's Head Teacher supported by allowing her to go into school and consult with children and advised on making the questionnaire easier to fill in.

Jamie wanted to find out about bullying and anti social behaviour. Her questionnaire was entitled, "How can we help stop bullying and anti social behaviour in our communities? Help us to be Heard". Twenty-five young people filled in her questionnaire and she collated their ages, gender, ethnicity, disability and postcodes. Jamie also designed everyone a certificate thanking them for taking part in the Children and Youth Board

survey.

## Rachel

Rachel from Rainhill near St.Helen's was 18 when she joined the Board, finding out about it through Barnados where she volunteers. Rachel hoped that she could get hers and other people's views across to young people and the Government by being part of the Board.

Rachel carried out a piece of regional work on anti social behaviour and bullying with a group of twelve female young carers aged 15-18 from Barnados. She had two discussion groups and asked for examples of people they knew who had been bullied or had experience of anti social behaviour. Rachel commented that one of the people in the group had an ASBO, but didn't know what it meant.

Rachel was supported by her mum and dad who encouraged her to be involved and Anne her support worker who attended the first two residentials with her. Lucy Read and the other staff from NCB and BYC guided and supported her work, and the rest of the Board were supportive by, "being a great gang to work with".

## William

William, from Gwynedd, North Wales, was 10 when he joined the Board. He found out about it via the RSPB Wildlife Explorers. His aim for the CYB was, "making sure the views of people from rural areas are heard".

William carried out a piece of regional work on anti social behaviour and bullying. He developed a questionnaire to use in schools and ran a focus group on bullying and how anti social behaviour affects people in the community. Fourteen children aged between 10-11 years; 7 boys and 7 girls, were involved. He also held a discussion group on anti social behaviour with fifteen boys aged 10-14 attending seven different schools. He described what he did:

"[I] led a discussion on what behaviours make people feel ashamed, uncomfortable or shocked. People talked about our town and where people go who behave like this. We discussed what makes people behave badly, talked about drugs, parents, drink. We talked about where to go for help and who to talk to in our town".

Seventy-six children, aged 9-11 were involved in his school discussions on anti-bullying; 34 boys and 42 girls. This was part of anti bullying week, and involved a school assembly, classroom work and a questionnaire.

Various people made him feel that he could do this: his Head Teacher

who talked to him about policy, and how it applies to the Local Council and the Welsh Assembly as well as Lucy Read and Joe Elias during the residential: “Joe made me feel happy, helped me bowl and made me a swan”. Helen Smeed helped with the arrangements and giving information on the phone. His mum helped him ‘think, travel to the residential and with the regional work’.

In addition, the other board members made him feel welcome and included. His local MP was, “helpful and encouraging”.

## Olivia

Olivia from Worcestershire was 10 when she joined the Board hearing about it from her Head Teacher. She hoped she could be a voice for children by being part of the Board.

As part of her regional work, during anti bullying week, Olivia gave out a questionnaire and discussed it with her school council; thirty-six children aged 8-12 yrs; 18 boys and 18 girls (twelve children from each of years 5,6 and 7).

Lucy from NCB helped by giving her the questionnaire and a good idea of how many people were needed. Olivia’s Head Teacher was present in the room and gave advice.

## Emily

Emily from Derbyshire was 15 when she joined the Board finding out about it via the Young NCB website. She wanted to try and make a positive difference to the lives of young people in the UK, to make new friends and learn new skills.

Emily completed five reflection sheets between December 15<sup>th</sup> 2005 and January 26<sup>th</sup> 2006, describing the process she went through to plan and carry out her regional work. Emily sent out a two-page questionnaire on improving school behaviour and tackling anti-social behaviour to five local secondary schools and a youth group. She involved one hundred and fifty young people.

The reflection sheets have been transcribed below as an interesting record of Emily’s learning and evaluation of her regional work.

	15 <sup>th</sup> December, 8p.m.	4 <sup>th</sup> January, 5p.m.	16 <sup>th</sup> January, 7.30p.m.	26 <sup>th</sup> January, 4.15p.m.
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What has just happened?	I have just started to plan my regional work. Feeling a bit nervous, I hope I can design a good questionnaire and that I can find the addresses for some schools in my area.	I've finished designing the questionnaire on the governments 'Respect' agenda that I will be using for my regional work	I have written a covering letter for my regional work, I have got some addresses to send the questionnaires to	Just posted some more questionnaires off to various schools and youth groups in my area
What's positive right now?	I am excited at the challenge	Very pleased that I've got it done	Satisfied - I have got it done.	Pleased that I have got it done, feeling of satisfaction
What's negative right now	There's still loads I've got to do	I've now got to find out some addresses of schools and youth clubs	I now need to do LOTS of stapling (stapling the monitoring form to the questionnaire), which I am really not looking forward to.	
What can you learn from this?	I've just got to get on with the work	That I can design questionnaires!		That I can get things done
What help or support do you need right now?	Need to talk to Lucy Read about the work	Help to research addresses and help to photocopy the questionnaire	People to help me do some stapling	For someone at NCB to tell me when the schools/ youth groups return questionnaires in SAE's to NCB

The regional work was a very powerful part of the Board's experience for a significant number of children and young people. For many, as the above demonstrates, a key element of success in achieving their regional work was down to available support locally and their connections with NCB/BYC staff. Many CYB members also mentioned and thanked parents and other family members as well as the other members of the Board.

Regional training took place at two residentials and the first and second ministerial meeting to enable members to carry out this work and the consultants believe that the amount of work completed was indeed impressive and a great success.

The following summarises all stakeholders feedback regarding the challenges related to regional work;

- Pressure of course work and exams at school and other commitments on members.
- Conducting difficult surveys and collating findings into lengthy reports for NCB/DfES.
- The lack of template letters and consistent information for members to give out to their schools and projects did not help – paperwork had to be created by each member according to what they wanted to do and some lacked confidence and support to do this.
- Gaps of time between residentials and Ministerial meetings meant that some members forgot what they were meant to be doing and this put extra pressure on the project staff to offer support via telephone and email.
- Lack of communication between members about regional work in between their meetings did not help with motivation.
- Not everyone had enough support at a local level which goes some way to explaining why some members found the regional work particularly challenging.
- Gaining access to groups of children and young people locally was difficult for some members - CRB checks were needed in some cases and these took three months to obtain.
- The lack of media coverage or public profile of the Board hindered the regional work. Members felt that this also affected their ability to access local groups as adult 'gatekeepers' had not heard of the DfES CYB.

“People don't take us seriously as they don't know what it is”

Finally, feedback from DfES officials praised the quantity and reach of regional work and the huge efforts that the Board undertook to make this activity happen locally. The detail of the feedback as well as the range of children and young people surveyed impressed officials.

On this issue, a good point was made about the format of the feedback to DfES from such regional work. One official remarked that collating the findings in bullet pointed lists, such as those within the document entitled, 'Policy ideas so far' could easily be 'ignored by officials'. There were 'too many ideas' and these needed consolidation to be feedback either as 'key findings' from the Board or as the Board's recommendations on a particular policy area based on findings from their regional work. All feedback sent to officials was based on initial work and all were aware that the final findings would be collated and written formally. Each policy official was also asked how frequently they would like feedback (i.e. as and when received or collated at the end). Only three policy officials asked for feedback as it arrived and it is interesting to note that these are some of the most impressive areas of impact.

## Improvements for future practice

Many of these suggestions follow directly from the challenges voiced by stakeholders above and link to improvements already discussed:

- More information specifically for support workers parents and carers would ensure that they know what is involved and what is expected of them as supporters of regional work. They would like to work with another person in their region to support Board members to organise a regional conference around a theme. Some support workers, parents and carers expressed that they would like to be informed directly about what their child or young person needs to be doing via telephone if they had not attended residential.
- Development of a local support network with paid sessional staff would help to alleviate a wide range of issues stated above as well as better facilitate members to gain access to groups of children and young people for consultation purposes etc.
- Members suggested clustering into smaller regional groupings with allocated workers from the national project staff. This might make them feel more able to ask for support if work is not happening as planned. Smaller clusters might be able to offer peer support more readily via more frequent regional meetings.
- Outgoing Board members could help new members with regional work via a buddying system.
- Access to shared tools, (see previous suggestions for improvements and the use of IT) for example, one questionnaire that everyone created together, would enable members to better compare results and findings from regional policy consultation work. DfES officials also suggested that regional work could be simplified by having template consultation documents that can be collated more effectively into concise recommendations or key findings.
- Members suggested that less time between residential and more enforced deadlines for regional work would help them set goals and 'get it done in a planned way'.
- A higher profile for the Board via TV programmes such as Blue Peter, Newsround and/or regional TV networks or local/national press would ensure that more local people and 'gatekeepers' recognise and support the CYB members.
- Members suggested that separate training events would help support them to plan regional work specifically. In particular developing practical skills around putting together questionnaires, running focus groups, collating feedback etc. Members also wanted more resources for their regional work.
- The development of a conference style event for Board members attended by up to 200 children and young people was suggested as a means of enabling the Board to actively seek out views and debate policy issues with a wide range

of children and young people. This would provide opportunities for 'action learning' as well as be a fun and creative way for the DfES to gather extensive feedback. Delegates could be invited via the networks that are attached to the partners and the DfES.

## 5.3. Impact of the Board

### Overview

In this section, the consultants evaluate the impact of the Board on the members themselves and on DfES policy and practice. In order that important lessons are drawn from this year's Board, the consultants present a range of case studies and direct feedback from members. Six key elements have been identified, from the perspective of the children and young people, which enabled the Board to have such a profound impact upon them.

### Impact of being on the Board for members

There were a wide range of impacts originally envisaged for Board members as a result of their participation on the Board. Impact was defined as relating to members skill, experience and attitudinal developments.

It was hoped that members would;

- Gain an understanding of the political environment in which policy and the investment of public funds takes place and how children and young people can influence current government priorities
- Develop core skills; e.g. communication and presentation, group work, representing the views of others and teamwork via individual learning plans for each member and training
- Feel valued by Government, have increased confidence and have developed emotionally, personally and socially

### Key findings

As described in the methodology, an evaluation toolkit was designed specifically for members to share their thoughts in a variety of fun formats about the impact of being on the Board. The consultants designed the questions in order to assess impacts as described above. The results have been presented as case studies in order to focus on a sample of members and their journey from starting with the Board through to the present day.

Members were asked to describe their skill levels prior to joining the Board and identify skills and experiences that they gained from being part of the Board and carrying out Board activities. Members reflected on how this learning improved their abilities on the Board as well as in wider contexts, such as at school. The Logbooks, Scrapbooks and Reflection Sheets provided the opportunity for Board members to feedback in their own time and in a way that felt comfortable to them. In addition to the toolkit, the consultants carried out groupwork and individual activities at both the residential and Ministerial meetings to capture evidence of impact.

Board members feedback to the consultants that the evaluation tools and meetings were a fun and safe space for them to reflect honestly on their experience, and to voice any of their concerns and remaining questions.

The case studies presented below specifically reflect on the changes that children and young people have noticed in themselves, in their own voices. They evidence changes in members perceptions of their core skills and levels of confidence, the new things they have learnt about Government Policy and the political environment, as well as what they gained from their Regional work and consultations. The case studies also present children and young people's perceptions of both their own and the whole Board's biggest achievements.

## **Voices of the Board**

Nine case studies are presented below. The first three have been developed from older members' feedback via their Logbooks and are therefore more detailed. The last six, developed from feedback from Scrapbooks are members' reflections on the changes they have noticed.

### **Lidya**

Lidya from Bedfordshire was 15 when she joined the Board. She found out about the Board from her Head of 6<sup>th</sup> form and wanted to get involved to help children and young people, mainly in her area to be respected by adults and have an equal say.

When Lidya joined the Board she felt her skills included 'analysis, seeing the positive in every situation, and making the best of what is being offered to her'. She had very little experience of being involved in a project like the CYB, and described her confidence levels as fairly low.

#### **These are the changes that she has noticed in herself since beginning with the Board:**

- 'Confidence is much greater, especially while I am working with the CYB as I know no one will laugh if I get something wrong while discussing. I know if I have a problem with my regional work – I can ask for help!'
- 'My time management is better now, as I know I have to think about things/ events in advance and always have a second plan... so I am very happy with the use of this skill'.
- 'I know if I need help with CYB work I can get it and this makes me believe I can do it anyway, because they trust me to do it and they must be right.'

#### **The new things she learnt about:**

- Government policy – 'It takes a lot of time to create laws and there are a lot of people who look at it, so if it's a law it must have satisfied a lot of people'
- Regional work – 'It takes a lot of planning and a lot of time to complete. but it's

worth it'

- Consulting with children and young people – 'You have to try your best because you know what its like to be disappointed with someone and I don't want anyone to feel that way about me.'

### **Her biggest achievement:**

"Completing my regional work and feeding it back to the Minister; knowing I am truly making a difference to the kids in the UK and Bedfordshire".

### **The Boards biggest achievement:**

"Getting such a big diversity in age, gender, religion and ethnicity in the Board, we truly represent the children and young people in the UK".

## **Martin**

Martin, from Northern Ireland was 15 when he joined the Board. He heard about the Board from the Northern Ireland Commissioner for children and young people's youth panel. He wanted "to put across the views of children and young people in my area which are unique and different from other people throughout the UK".

Martin Tierney had a lot of previous experience as part of his local youth council and school council. He described his confidence levels as average and himself as a 'team worker, enthusiastic and entertaining'.

### **These are the changes that he has noticed in himself since beginning with the Board:**

- 'Confidence has increased'
- 'More sociable in a group, less shy'
- 'Improved organisational and presentation skills'
- 'More positive about being part of a group with a real say in decisions'
- 'I aim higher because I feels I can reach any goal'

### **The new things he has learnt about:**

- Government policy – 'lengthy process before change occurs'
- Regional work – 'organisation!'
- Consulting with children and young people – 'people need lots of encouragement to participate'

### **His biggest achievements:**

Contributing fully to group discussions

### **The Boards biggest achievement:**

Influencing government policy

## **Jo Ann**

Jo Ann, from Charlton, was 14 and a half when she joined the Board and her deputy Head teacher gave her the application form. She wanted, “the Government to listen to the views of young people”.

Jo Ann had a quite a lot of previous experience from her involvement in her school council, college council, as a peer and school mentor. She described herself as ‘self motivated, bright, accepting and a perfectionist’. Her skills as; ‘debating, time keeping, multi tasking and writing’ and her confidence levels as average.

### **These are the changes that he has noticed in herself since beginning with the Board:**

- ‘Increased confidence; at the first meeting with the Minister I didn’t speak out a lot, but in the second I spoke more and challenged the minister’
- ‘I made some new friends and even shared a room with someone at the second residential’
- ‘Improved skills in script writing, I had to write a short one for my residential and it had to be age appropriate and put across a message in a non patronising way’
- ‘I feel pleased that I didn’t give into nervous feelings when I first received the application form’
- ‘I have learnt a lot about organisation and deadlines. I also developed an interest in politics and the way the government works’

### **The new things she has learnt about:**

- Government Policy – ‘I learnt about green papers and white papers and why it takes a long time to get things done’
- Regional work – ‘It takes a lot of organisation and communication with people you wouldn’t usually do both’
- Consulting children and young people – ‘That despite most of their denying most people like to be asked their opinion’

### **Her biggest achievements:**

'Challenging the ministers' views, working with my friends and other Board members and getting things done'.

### **The Boards biggest achievements:**

'Feedback to the minister, brought together people from across the UK of different ages, managed to get along'.

## **Aisha**

Aisha from East London was 10 when she joined the Board. She wanted 'to be involved in making decisions and meet other people'.

Aisha thinks she has changed since being involved in the CYB because at the first residential she felt nervous and didn't think she had much confidence. Since the second residential she feels she has more confidence and knows much more about, 'the parties in the parliament'.

She reports that now, "I think I am more confident and speak more loudly" and that, "I think I have enjoyed everything we have done on the youth board, truly."

## **Daniela**

Daniela from Aldershot, was 13 when she joined the Board. She heard about it via her youthworker. She wanted 'to have fun, make new friends and make her views and opinions count so they make a difference'.

When she started Daniela described was 'nervous, not prepared, little knowledge of government, scared and not knowing what to expect'. She thinks she has changed a lot, "I have learnt a lot more skills. My knowledge is also a lot better".

## **Jamie Leigh**

Jamie Leigh has noticed lots of changes since becoming involved in the Board, 'I write quicker, I am more confident, and I am developing more knowledge and understanding'.

Jamie Leigh drew her learning process where she starts with an 'F' mark because she didn't know what other people think about bullying and anti social behaviour and then by communicating with others via the phone, by email and by writing things down she develops a better understanding of the different views people have and so she gets an 'A+'.

## Rachel

Rachel said she was 'nervous, excited, and not sure what to expect' when she started with the CYB and has noticed lots of changes.

'I am now more confident, have learnt new skills and knowledge, and know a little bit about how government policy works'.

She has met lots of different people of different ages, learnt how to work alongside them, and is sorry it is ending.

## William

William has noticed lots of changes since becoming involved with the CYB, "I am older, taller, busier, more involved, think more, better known in area, more confident, wider travelled, more experienced, better organised, less shy, more able to talk in groups, better at talking to adults, good at getting myself heard, plan things better, happy!"

## Olivia

When she started on the Board Olivia was "a little bit confident, talkative – willing to share ideas, excited and nervous about not knowing anyone". She thinks she has definitely changed since becoming involved with the CYB, "I am more knowledgeable about Parliament, I've got better people skills and my confidence has grown".

"During my time with the Board, I have never done something that was boring or I did not enjoy. The experience has been incredible."

The consultants gathered feedback from Board members at the final residential about what being on the Board had meant to them. The comments presented below give more evidence of the profound impact of being on the Board for their learning, skills and confidence;

"More important, more knowledgeable about government, gained more skills, fantastic, given me more confidence, know children's views are heard as well as adults. It's great"

"The Board has given me the opportunity to develop more confidence, it has given me the opportunity to have a say in government policy. It has meant I have met a great bunch of people, both adults and young people alike and made me proud that I have contributed to something that will affect young people in the future"

“Prepared, a lot more knowledge, happy, proud, I see the world in a different light...standing up for what I believe in”

“I am proud to have been involved and to have met and been able to tell people from bigger places about life in a rural area”

From the case studies and quotes above, it is clear that these children and young people have gained a great deal from being involved in the Children and Youth Board, and this is reflected across the entire group. They have all had a challenging experience that has left them feeling pleased, positive, confident, listened to, that they have made a difference, skilled and with a huge sense of personal achievement that they can be really proud of. In addition, they can also identify the achievements of the Board as a whole and a better understanding of Government Policy.

## **Six key elements to a successful impact**

In order that important lessons are drawn from this year’s Board, the consultants have reflected on the wide range of feedback elicited from members during the year. This reflection has resulted in an analysis pinpointing six key elements, from the perspective of the children and young people themselves, which enabled the Board to have such a profound impact upon them. Surprisingly perhaps these elements also contain some of the most difficult challenges for the members.

The following section summarises why these six elements have made such a difference.

### **• The interview to gain a place on the Board**

Perhaps not surprisingly the interview was the first significant experience for many Board members, and many children and young people remarked that this was a key highlight. It was a very positive experience being accepted on to the Board and members reported enjoying it, even though it was a challenge.

‘It made me think about what I should say and I knew it was really important so I had to prepare well before hand’.

### **• The residentials**

The residentials represented an important stage in the development of the Board and were very intense experiences for all members. These opportunities were new for the vast majority for the children and young people and enabled them to grow personally and develop new skills. Members talked about the challenges of getting to know a whole group of new people, learning lots of new things in quick succession, engaging with new ideas about government and policy, travelling to new parts of the country etc. Primarily, members felt these were important to the

process of Board development because they were good fun, the staff were supportive and each person made new friends.

‘The 1<sup>st</sup> residential was great - getting to know people and learning what I will be doing as a CYB member and the only Bedfordshire representative’

‘I just had really good fun’

‘I’ve never been to a residential before and I hadn’t met and had to work with that many strangers before’.

### • The regional work

The regional work was a phenomenal experience for most of the children and young people even though in many cases it was a real challenge. Some members reported feeling very unsure about what they were supposed to be doing at times. Those members that carried out a piece of regional work reported a great sense of excitement and nervousness whilst in the planning stages, with a resulting feeling of relief and achievement when it was done.

‘Deciding which questions to use in my questionnaire was a bit difficult but I got help from Lucy so it all ended well!’

‘Reading opinions of students in my school and ideas I hadn’t considered before was a great experience’

‘Meeting so many new young people who were really different from me meant that I could share their ideas directly with government’

### • Meeting with the Minister

Meetings with the Minister were a real highlight for members and not surprisingly, it was this element of the work with the Board that made many feel like they were making a difference to government. In addition, as can be seen from the previous case study quotes, members felt pleased when they had enough confidence in their opinions to offer challenges to the Minister in meetings.

‘The minister is a very successful woman and talking to her made me feel important to some extent and feeling that was very nice and pleasant’.

‘Great to be listened to by an MP and to share feelings on government proposals’.

‘Gave me a sense of importance and of actual involvement with something’

## • Importance of supportive relationships with NCB/BYC Project Staff

Support from staff was a very important and significant part of the experience for all children and young people on the Board, both at meetings and in terms of organising and carrying out their regional work. The support from staff was key to helping the Board members feel like they were making a difference.

In particular, members referred to their relationships with Lucy Read and Helen Smeed as important to their overall experience of the Board. The impact of developing such positive relationships with a range of adults; being encouraged, being challenged and being recognised for their achievements is overwhelmingly important and needs to be acknowledged as a key element to the success of this years Board.

Certainly, the amount of work dedicated to supporting individual members developmental needs and the processes put in place for this are very impressive. There is no question that staff gave 100% commitment to including and supporting every member.

“They have all tried their best to let me do what I can as good as I can do it’.

‘Everything I needed help with has been sorted and everyone has been trying their best for me and I really appreciate that’

‘Staff know how to engage the children and young people in group discussions and ensure no one is left out’.

‘I felt more at ease with my work because I knew I had a lot of people to help and advise me if I needed it. It stopped me getting sad and made me happy’.

‘Lucy has always been there at the end of the phone if I have needed advice. Helen has always been helpful when arranging travel and accommodation’.

‘All the staff are amazing they support us by listening, helping with ideas, organising meetings, making things fun and making sure we feel safe and happy’.

## • Importance of supportive relationships with other significant adults

Adults locally gave a significant amount of support and practical help. This included help from Heads of year (helping with sending out questionnaires), teachers (photocopying or gaining permission) local youth workers etc. For some, it seems that the support from family made the difference between being able to

do their regional work, understand their role and in some cases get to residential, or not.

'The support I got from the staff at NCB and BYC, Youthworker, teacher and parents was very important to me because if it wasn't for them I wouldn't of been able to cope with all the problems. And it is also very important you have someone you can talk to when you don't know what to do otherwise you will get stuck and become worried'.

'Parents helped by talking and staying with me because I am only 8'.

'Without my mum I could not have done the regional work'.

## **Key Challenges for Board members**

Board members shared their ideas about the challenges they had experienced during their year. Three key areas are summarised below:

### **Local isolation and lack of support with regional work**

Some children and young people struggled more than others with their regional work. There were a variety of reasons for this which included; difficulties with gaining access to children and young people in their area, challenges around developing resources such as questionnaires, and problematic time commitments.

"I have felt quite isolated and It seemed to be too much up to me to decide what I should be finding out"

'I did not always know what I was meant to be doing and sometimes it felt hard to call staff to find out'.

### **Planning and timing of residential (including social activities)**

There were issues for some about knowing in advance when and where meetings were taking place. Many also reported feeling rushed by the amount of work they had to cover at each residential. Members wanted more timely information about times and dates for events and wanted staff to keep to established deadlines.

'On the second residential there was a bowling trip. The first residential did not involve enough time to socialise and get to know one another. The second was much better in this respect, however not as many people attended'.

'On the residential we didn't have enough time so we had to work quick and had to leave bits out, including getting to know people time. Longer

## Travel

Getting to the residential was hard for a number of members because they had to take flights and get up very early to arrive on time.

## Improvements for future practice

The following represents feedback from all members on how to improve the impact of the experience for future Board members. Much of this is reiterated in other sections of the report. In addition, members were asked in their Logbooks to imagine and describe the best and most successful Children and Youth Board in the world.

This combined feedback is summarised as follows using direct quotes from Board members:

- 'Same members for more than a year. This way the people who are involved will know each other (including skills and weaknesses) and be able to work efficiently for the common good. Also just when members have built their confidence for the work they are doing, they are stopped. So, I think that a very successful CYB will be if the 'membership' was longer'.
- 'Meet more regularly, not only 3 times for the whole time because this way we can get help not only from Lucy and the others, but from one another. The support we give one another is just as important, because the other CYB members have also gone through what you have and if they say it's good, it really is!'
- 'There should be more publicity of what we are doing as well, because when I did my regional work, no-one knew what the NCB and BYC were and that way I felt a little bit let down, as I expected kids to know, but they weren't given the opportunity to!'
- 'We want to see the results from our discussions, work and meetings from the DfES'.
- 'Involve children and young people in drafting government policies'.
- 'The children and young people should be able to contact any MP in any department and choose policies to work on'
- 'I would like to meet other ministers and be able to contact Beverly Hughes directly'.
- 'Whilst on the Board I would like to be invited to talk to my local council members about local issues'

- 'We should do regional work in pairs and groups as far as possible'.
- 'Have more people on the Board so more voices could be heard and have more 1 day meetings'.
- 'Make sure that people from Scotland and Wales were able to pass on their findings direct to their own assemblies, who know about the Board'.
- 'Have more than one hour with the minister so we don't have to squash all the things the CYB wants to tell her'
- 'Give more choice to children and young people as to when and where meetings will take place'
- 'Provide more material i.e. questionnaires etc. for regional work'
- 'Start regional work at the first residential so we can work on more than one policy'
- 'Have a big CYB internet site and advertise in schools and libraries'

## **Impact of the Board on DfES Policy and practice**

In order to evaluate the impact of the Board on DfES policy and practice this section is organised under the following headings;

- DfES objectives and tasks to fulfil their project remit
- Summary of key pieces of DfES project work
- Key Findings - impact of the Board on DfES policy and practice
- Improvements for future practice

## **DfES Objectives to fulfil their project remit**

The original tender outlined a range of objectives for the DfES to support and ensure the success of the CYB. It was originally hoped that policy makers would:

- Involve the Board in policy formation in order that they may advise and shape policy at the earliest possible stages.
- Be confident and competent in communicating with the Board.
- Ensure feedback on policy decisions would be given to the Board where there was evidence of decisions being informed by the CYB's views and opinions.

## **DfES tasks to fulfil their project remit**

The original tender outlined the following range of tasks that the DfES would carry out to enable the above objectives to be met:

- Promoting the involvement of children and young people within the DfES at every opportunity.
- Establishing mechanisms to keep up to date with policy priorities.
- Facilitating meetings with relevant ministers as appropriate.

## **Summary of key pieces of DfES project work**

This section gives a brief chronology of the activities that the DfES (in partnership with the project partners) completed in order to fulfil their remit.

## **Training and awareness raising for DfES policy leads**

Early on in the life of the Board, a two hour training workshop was delivered twice to different officials by NCB to raise awareness on the work of the CYB and support officials in developing plans to meaningfully involve the Board. Eleven staff members attended one of these events and it appears from the evaluation that it was very well received (the consultants were not able to locate evaluation data from the second workshop). The sessions covered a wide range of issues including participation as a concept, and how to access children and young people's opinions for policy development.

Feedback from project and DfES staff suggests that the participants attending the trainings were not necessarily the same people who subsequently submitted a completed policy template requesting CYB involvement. DfES staff also suggested that it would be helpful if all DfES staff working with the Board could attend such an event.

## **Development of a 'Policy Template' and consultation processes**

DfES and the partners created a policy template in order to identify the areas of policy for CYB members to consult on. It was intended to enable as many departments as possible to articulate their needs with regards to involving the CYB in the development of their policy areas. Following a memo sent out by a DfES Director, policy leads were asked to complete the template by giving a brief overview of their team's work, what involvement they were seeking from the Board, what timescales they were working towards and what support they could offer to the CYB. They were asked to state, for example, if they would attend residential to explain their policy area.

The response from policy leads was very good. Twelve completed templates were received by the DfES and NCB, which represented more requests than the Board could actually work on. The DfES report that it was difficult to ascertain which policy areas should be prioritised. A 'tough decision' was taken to get a balance reflecting what the children and young people themselves wanted to talk about, what areas would be most meaningful for the Board and what would make the most impact.

The policy areas that the Board covered over the year were:

- Anti Social Behaviour (The Respect Action Plan); via regional work
- Improving School Behaviour; via regional work
- Child Care Bill; via personal work
- Common Assessment Framework – via personal work
- Youth Green Paper; via personal work
- Disability; via personal work

- EC Directive/ Participation of children and young people; via personal work
- Children's Work Force; via personal work

During the year, the DfES developed a range of ways to consult with the Board depending on the information they wanted or needed. Some consultations took place with the twenty-five Board members to elicit their own personal responses. Other areas of consultation were carried out via the members' regional work. The consultation processes were in part stipulated by DfES and policy timescales and were negotiated with the Board Co-ordinator as to their viability.

Some DfES policy leads provided information sheets and consultation questionnaires for each of the policy areas, and this paperwork was utilised as discussion starters and frameworks for exercises to develop Board members thinking and opinions at residentials. Policy leads wanted the Board to make comments, voice opinions, concerns and/or ideas on particular issues in order to influence national ideas and policy. The Board Co-ordinator in consultation with NCB's policy team played a prominent role in translating policy information into child friendly language and identifying questions that the policy leads wanted the Board to focus on. This was reported as taking up quite a bit of time in an already busy schedule and was indicated as an area of work in need of improvement.

Other policy leads wanted feedback on, "readability, appropriateness, understanding and scope" in order to develop revised documentation such as the Youth Green Paper Consultation Document.

The following is an example of the style and type of questions that the policy lead for Anti-Social Behaviour wanted the Board to think about and feedback on:

- What behaviour do you think should be called anti-social?
- How big a problem do you think anti-social behaviour is?
- Why do children and young people behave like this?
- What can we do about it?
- Can schools do more to tackle anti-social behaviour?
- Can other services do more to help?

CYB responses to policy questionnaires were collated by NCB, either because they had the information directly from members at residentials or they had the results of CYB members' individual regional consultations. This range of feedback was passed to the DfES leads via written reports, lists of feedback and/or summary documents, such as 'Young People's views so far' (2006).

The processes outlined above were always assumed to be evolving in nature during the life of this years Board and were tailored to the needs of the particular area of DfES policy as the year progressed.

## **Key findings – impact on DfES policy and practice**

It must be said from the outset that there are challenges in assessing and measuring the impact of the Board on DfES policy and practice in such a short evaluation period. The reasons for this are two-fold. Firstly, the very nature of policy making is complex and lengthy. Secondly, and critically important to this project, the mechanisms within the DfES to consistently track the feedback from the Board through the policy making processes do not appear to be in place. It should also be noted that the DfES was without a key member of staff for this project for four out of the past eleven months and this has impacted on this area of the project.

That said, all DfES officials interviewed and surveyed reported that the Board has had a very positive impact on the internal policy making and practices of the Department, demonstrated by the following quotes from Policy Leads:

‘Feedback on the Respect Action Plan received via emails was shared with the Children’s Commissioner and colleagues within the Respect Task force at the Home Office’.

‘The comments from the discussions of the CYB were carefully considered in the development of this document and I would be really grateful if you could pass this on and our thanks to the Board members. We would be really interested to follow up with the Board on what they think of the proposals in this document’. (Referring to the Youth Green Paper Consultation Document)

‘Ministers have read the comments of the Board members with interest and stressed how keen they are to ensure they are reflected in developing policy’

‘I have understood more about engagement with the CYB through this process’

The Boards views played a fundamental role in the “Respect Action Plan” publication and during the final residential they fed back their views to the policy lead as to whether the action plan would work. The Board consulted with other children and young people on the Youth Green Paper and helped to edit the “Youth Matters – Next Steps” document and wrote the foreword for this publication. One Board member also attended a breakfast meeting with Beverley Hughes on “Youth Matters”.

In addition, Board members gave their personal views to policy leads on the Children’s Workforce and the EC Directive. Their responses on the EC Directive

were included in the DfES' report on behalf of the UK government regarding its implementation of the OMC (Open Method of Communication). Finally, one Board member attended the EC Presidency for three days in Cardiff, as part of the UK's series of events during its Presidency of the EU where a young people's youth declaration was created.

Regarding the training that was delivered to DfES officials by NCB, evidence suggests that the training was very positively received;

"The session was very useful and has huge relevance to my particular policy area".

Most participants felt the training was relevant to the nature and responsibility of their job and that it gave them something new to follow up. They also reported that they felt that other key staff such as HEO's, divisional colleagues and at least one member from each department team should attend.

Better targeting of staff together with wider promotion of this opportunity by the DfES might have developed a greater understanding across the department. In addition, senior department feedback suggests that staff attending the training were not senior enough to be able to utilise their learning to effect positive practice based changes regarding consultation processes that might benefit the Board or wider participation initiatives within the Department.

DfES staff working on this project within the Children's Views and Interests Team felt that it was challenging to manage the expectations of the department once the Board had been initially promoted. Understandably, a wide range of policy leads were interested in seeking input from the CYB, and deciding subsequent policy areas for the Board was a difficult task. A clear procedure for decision-making in this area had not been agreed in advance.

In addition, feedback from the Team demonstrates a 'recognised risk' that the existence of the CYB could make participation a 'tick box exercise' for the DfES, unless it is part of a whole organisational participation strategy;

"It is giving an easy way to contact young people but it concerns me that it's a really easy way, this concerns me as we are not developing a culture of participation, the Board has a limited capacity".

There is a current question for the DfES about how policy areas will be identified for the future and whether these should be stipulated at a senior level within the department. If this were the case, it might enhance the ability at a senior level to promote and embed understanding and commitment to participation generally across the department. However, in terms of children and young people's participation, and the Board, a balance is still needed around how much of the agenda is defined by adults and how much Board members are involved in setting the agenda and areas of policy themselves or in partnership. The establishment of the policy agenda needs to be based on children and young

people truly understanding the policy to make an informed choice and this needs to be balanced against DfES priorities, which will in turn make for greater impact.

All stakeholders' feedback on the challenging question of what can realistically be expected of the Board given the time available, particularly given the commitment by all to ensuring that good practice principles of participation and involvement are adhered to. For example, policy making constraints means the DfES might need to secure information and input quickly from the Board at times. Similarly DfES and project staff are acutely aware of the issues involved with asking children and young people to attend events and seminars at very short notice and with little preparation.

These findings are not new, and in fact mirror three of the 'key lessons learned' from the previous years evaluation; that DfES needed to ensure clear two way communication with partners; 'dedicate time to thrash out face to face with its new partners exactly what the roles and responsibilities of all parties are; what the philosophy and tone of the initiative is; what characterises 'participation' as opposed to consultation and what each party can legitimately expect of the other'. Finally, that 'the deal' in terms of possibilities and constraints is made very clear to participants, otherwise unrealistic expectations will undermine real progress made. These lessons are picked up on in the final section of this report,' Key Recommendations'.

Regarding the style of feedback to the DfES (following Board residentials or regional work) DfES officials indicated that in order to capitalise on the Board's expertise within DfES policy making processes, feedback needs to be collated and presented as a collective response to a particular question;

'The Minister has been extremely receptive to the views of the Board although the feedback is often presented in a raw, 'focus group' type way. It would be useful, in terms of ensuring that the young people's views had an impact, if the young people could be focussed on expressing solid recommendations that they could put to the Minister'.

This feedback suggests that policy leads and officials are seeing real benefits of the CYB's input to their work and want to *strengthen* the connections between the CYB's work, policy making and implementation in the DfES and wider Government. Indeed, overall, policy leads felt that responses from the CYB had helped them improve policy content and provide a 'backdrop of contextual information' from a children and young person's perspective.

'The residential event in September was really timely in terms of talking to the Board. We have received feedback which we have been able to consider as we develop policy and talk to Ministers about making decisions. It has also helped us present the case for DfES policy to other government departments'.

Very positively, a number of DfES officials reported that they would value more consistent feedback and a closer relationship with the Board in order to help develop an ongoing mechanism and dialogue between the Board and the DfES.

'I think the Board needs to meet more regularly, monthly meetings... if they met once a month they could do a great deal more and be integral to our processes'.

In relation to this issue, a number of policy leads felt that information from the Board took too long to come back even though the partners did communicate on a number of occasions with policy leads in order to identify the best methods of information exchange.

'I would have hoped to have received quicker feedback from the residential event to allow me to share this with ministers at an earlier stage'.

A lead DfES staff member in place throughout the duration of the project may have ensured more effective and consistent understanding and methods of feedback. However, it was originally envisaged that Policy leads would attend more residential and Board meetings to get feedback directly from the Board but this was limited. Nevertheless the Minister working directly with the Board, helped to raise the profile of participation across the directorate and the department.

'[The Minister meeting with the Board]... encourages other teams to consult young people and officials in the DfES have contacted me directly to seek advice about how to involve young people in their work. It provides a model of participation which people in the DfES can learn from'.

There is no doubt that the existence of the Board has required a range of people, including the Minister, to think more clearly about how they want the CYB to work in the future. This is crucial to the overall success or otherwise of the Board in terms of its impact on DfES policy and practice.

As it stands, feedback from key DfES officials suggests that given the stage of its development, within existing DfES structures, the Board has been very successful at;

'inform[ing] the *context* in which policy decisions are made'.

Members have indeed given their views and opinions direct to government from a 'child's perspective' and enabled the DfES to 'learn what its like to be a young person now'. DfES officials report that they have 'used this information as a backdrop to make decisions'. In addition, there is no doubt that the Board have fed into an impressive range of policy areas, many of which have been high profile. This is evidenced, in particular, by the input to the Respect Action Plan and the Youth Green Paper, which provided an ongoing opportunity for the Board to effect policy and practice. This also gave policy officials the opportunity to

invest considerable time and thought into developing their areas of work with input from the Board.

DfES officials see the Board as an important element in a wider cultural change. They see more potential for the Board to ensure that the voices and opinions of children and young people are, as in the original aim for the Board, **involved within the very heart of Government**. Officials recognise the Board's value in demonstrating true principles of participation practice and policy. There remain questions for the future however, about the DfES's ambitions for the Board within the Department, as well as its vision of the Board's role and the extent of its influence. In particular, how much power the Board will be given, and how actively involved in decision-making it could become.

In order for the Board to fulfil its potential, all DfES staff in the Children's Views and Interests Team recognise that this area of their work should be prioritised and staffing levels need to be reviewed. The consultants believe that current staffing levels are too low to really capitalise on the work achieved so far. The consultants suggest that a team dedicated to supporting the work of the Board as part of a wider departmental youth participation strategy would ensure that the true potential of this project can be realised for everyone.

During the Board members exit interviews at the final residential, members were asked if they thought the Board had made an impact on the work of the DfES. Sixteen members responded, with fourteen reporting that they believed it had made a positive impact on policy and practice by the end of the year.

Exit interview evidence suggests that children and young people have a strong sense of their individual impact and difference made. Interestingly a significant number of children and young people questioned the impact that the Board 'as a whole' had made in light of their increased understanding of the policy making process. This evidence suggests that the Board may be able to work more collectively to come to agreements about key recommendations, as has been suggested by DfES officials.

The consultants asked members for evidence of their impact on DfES policy and practice. Most significantly, meeting with and reporting directly to the Minister three times a year was proof to Board members that children and young people were getting their views across. Their experience of being listened to and acknowledged was further evidence;

'When we talk to the minister she has two or more people listening to us and then writing it down'.

"I had a letter from the Minister which thanked me for my work on the Board, so I think some of it might have been listened to and has a chance of making a difference".

Other reasons given were hearing government spokespeople talking about issues that were discussed by the Board and getting feedback from the partners;

“I think that the Children and Youth Board does make a difference to the government policy because when I gave Lucy my questionnaire she said that she passed it on”.

Mostly members felt that having the Board helps the government understand what children and young people really think, and if there was no Board the government would not have access to children and young people’s views so all policy would be adult led. One young person’s MP locally was interested to know more about his involvement in the Board which that young person felt was evidence of a possible impact.

“I think it helps the government to know what children really think, and maybe those views might be heard and change into another right”.

### **Improvements for future practice**

- The DfES should think about its vision for the Board and involve members in these internal decision-making processes. Setting the boundaries or ‘stance’ of participation is totally appropriate so long as it’s negotiated openly with children and young people.
- If the Board is a first step in developing a participation strategy and bringing about a culture of participation then it is a very successful start. More background work will need to be invested in thinking about the role of the Board in relation to other participation work and consultation initiatives already happening within the Department.
- The DfES should continue to work with external expert agencies to deliver the operational side of any follow on initiative. It must be very clear with any contracted partners about its own role as ‘the client agency’ and the boundaries of its own participation and involvement in all planning and operational activities. The DfES should ensure adequate staffing to carry out its remit.
- The DfES need to think more strategically about the two year investment in this initiative and how it can be capitalised on for the future. £500k has been invested in training and supporting 50 children and young people to be involved on the Board, and overall achievement and impact needs to be reviewed in light of this investment. This is a strategic issue and will be picked up in the final section on Key Recommendations.
- A process needs to be established and agreed that enables the DfES to identify the policy areas that they wish the Board to focus on for the year.
- Tracking mechanisms need to be created to enable longitudinal studies of the impact of the Board on policy and practice. These evaluation benchmarks will

enable a better measurement of impact and change for the future as well as set the Department up as a beacon of good practice across government. In addition, feedback mechanisms will work to motivate children and young people to sustain their involvement and commitment to the department and their work.

- Case studies of the Board's work and its impact on the development of policy would work well to promote not only the members themselves but also the department's vision in relation to making participation a reality within the heart of government.
- The DfES should ensure that any delivery partners are contracted to develop and cascade programmes of training, awareness raising and capacity building internally to help departments 'create the conditions' in which children and young people's participation can really make an impact.

## 5.4. Managing communications

### Overview

In this section, the consultants evaluate the range of communications needed to bring about successful outcomes for the project.

The nature of this partnership project requires and relies on excellent and clear communication between all stakeholders. Given this is a complex area of the evaluation the consultants have chosen to split communications as follows;

Internal communications, which refers to:

- Communication between the partners and the Board, and between Board members themselves
- Communication between the Board and the DfES
- Communication between the partners and the DfES
- Communication within the DfES

External communications refers to all communication that relates to the promotion and profiling of the Board to outside audiences (media, youth organisations etc.).

### Internal communications

A key role for the partners in building the Board was to establish and maintain communication in a form chosen by and with Board members themselves. The partners also had clear overall responsibilities in all areas of communication with the Board; including supporting the Board to communicate amongst themselves, supporting Board members to communicate with other children and young people via their regional work, and to enable the Board to communicate their views to the DfES.

The original workplan identified these areas of responsibility but did not give huge detail on how they would be fulfilled. Again, this reflects the organic evolving nature of the project and the intention to involve Board members in defining how effective communication would be managed.

The Board Co-ordinator had the lead role in communications with Board members. This was assisted by BYC in communicating with the Board on matters relating to attendance at meetings and travel etc. In terms of communication between Board members, it was envisaged that children and young people might meet regionally outside of residential in order to support each others regional work. In addition, the partners were expected to clear and agree all communications about and to the Board with the department.

The partners had a lead role in managing communications between the Board and the DfES. It was a clear part of the DfES boundaries not to contact the CYB directly. It was envisaged that the Board would be supported to communicate with the DfES to feedback on key policy areas via Ministerial meetings, questionnaires and 'preparation of messages and advice' to officials at both residential and at a Team Leaders lunchtime seminar. It was recognised that this feedback needed to be in a format that the DfES could use.

Internal communication between the partners and DfES was envisaged to enable a joint role in developing the agenda for Board activities, to agree the make-up of the Board, as well as the methods for communicating the Board's activities to a wider audience including the media at external events.

The DfES had the lead role in promoting communication internally within the Department as a whole, about the Board; its existence, Board activities and the benefits of participation etc. This included lead responsibility for establishing mechanisms to keep up to date with emerging policy priorities across the department and to pass on relevant policy information to the partners for the Board 'in a timely manner'. The DfES also had the responsibility to ensure policy makers were 'confident and competent in communicating with the Board', to mediate the views and opinions of the Board to colleagues as appropriate and facilitate meetings with relevant ministers. Finally, the DfES were tasked with feeding back to the Board on policy decisions when there was evidence of decisions being informed by Board views and opinions, as well as when policy decisions were taken without due reference or in contradiction to views and opinions of the Board.

The original 'roles and responsibilities' document again details these areas of communication, but there appears to be little about 'how' the partners and the DfES would practically manage these communications. It is therefore not obvious how they intended to ensure clear and shared understanding and enable all partners to reflect on progress to date and agree areas for improved joint working at each stage of the development of the project.

### **Key findings – internal communications**

The consultants believe that given the complex nature of this project, together with limited set up and planning time, the partners have been very successful in managing all areas of communication with the Board. This is again demonstrated by the consistently high level of attendance by members throughout the project.

The vast majority of Board members report feeling comfortable and able to communicate with the Board Co-coordinator and seek advice and information when needed. Many reflected that the phone calls to check on travel arrangements were crucial in ensuring that they knew where to go and how to get there.

Some Board members, however, felt that the communication amongst themselves was not wholly successful this year and that meeting up in-between residential and ministerial meetings would have been very beneficial. Some

Board members reported feeling isolated from each other and would have benefited from more communication with other members particularly around regional work.

In terms of communication between the Board and the DfES, it seems at times that policy information and questions were delivered in tight timescales and not always in a language that was immediately accessible to members. In order to address this, the Board Co-ordinator and other staff put substantial time and effort into preparing documentation for residential, under pressure, and at a time when other practical considerations should have been prioritised.

At the beginning of the project, a staff member at the DfES had the lead role in mediating communication between the partners and DfES policy officials and leads. Due to a four-month gap in staffing, it appears that policy officials related directly to the Board Co-ordinator for this period of time. Communication suffered and the direct involvement of the DfES in setting the agenda and making its needs known was limited. The consultants feel that consequently, the DfES may have lost its foothold as an active, dynamic partner in the project at this point.

Whilst it is clear that NCB did an excellent job in communicating with policy officials directly, there is a question about whether this would have been more effective if it had been mediated throughout the duration of the project, as originally envisaged, by a member of the Children's Views and Interest Team with direct responsibility for this role. Having said this, when policy officials attended residential to feedback directly to the Board, children and young people reported having a clearer understanding of their impact. This suggests that direct communication by specific policy officials is more effective for the DfES and the children and young people. A central role within the department is necessary to facilitate this interaction.

Feedback from stakeholders consistently points to the DfES missing out on an opportunity to maximise the impact of the Board on the department. This is reflected in children and young people's feedback. Members feel that they have made a difference but when asked for concrete evidence they struggle to actually pinpoint it. It is also important to note that feedback on policy took a long time to have an impact that the Board could actually see (such as the concrete input on the "Respect Agenda"). One DfES official notes that this is partly a fundamental difficulty with tracking the impact of children and young people's participation (as opposed to any other specific factor, such as money, time, difficulty of implementation etc.) to an eventual decision or direction that is taken. The development of policy is slow and it is difficult to pin down a specific development or decision to the children and young people involved.

The consultants found it challenging to effectively map the internal communication mechanisms envisaged within the DfES to support the Board's work. The gap in staffing clearly had a major impact on the development of mechanisms to both ensure communication, tracking and feedback.

The partners and the DfES had periodic meetings to enable sharing of information and ideas, which were reported as extremely beneficial. It was

agreed by all however, that all partners needed more frequent meetings to discuss details around communication mechanisms and tracking etc. The consultants believe that more frequent meetings would have enabled all partners to voice their specific experiences of the project and highlight areas from their perspective that needed attention in order to maximise success. Regular meetings, with open and honest reflection are essential to the ongoing effectiveness of communication in complex partnership working to deliver a high profile, successful project.

## **Improvements to internal communications**

- Better use of IT might help future Board members to communicate amongst themselves and share experiences and learning, particularly around carrying out regional work and sharing resources. However, staff suggest that this would not have been a suitable mechanism for the current Board as few had access to computers or the Internet.
- Children and young people have suggested that an identified, named adult for clusters of children and young people in a region would help them communicate more easily around support needs.
- Central Board Co-ordination sited in the same organisation will help reduce the possibility of miscommunication.
- Better promotion of opportunities for policy officials to engage directly with the CYB and to attend participation training (including how to make policy documents and consultation paperwork young person friendly).
- Policy officials need to make a concrete commitment to communicate the Boards ideas to the Minister and the rest of their team.
- The Minister in particular could develop a closer on-going dialogue with Board members, via increased numbers of ministerial meetings, attendance at residential and regional meetings. While this might be time-heavy, the consultants do believe that closing the gap between the Board and department would add value to the investment by the DfES in this project. This would build on the perspectives of the Board for whom meeting with the Minister was the strongest evidence for impact.
- A well planned schedule of partnership meetings are needed to reflect on the ongoing successes and challenges of managing the project. In particular, opportunities for DfES officials and the Minister to work more directly and closely with Board members should be explored. For this to be effective, the support and training needs of DfES officials will need to be addressed, as already highlighted.
- Senior DfES officials and the Minister should have opportunities to feed ideas into a CYB workplan at the earliest opportunity. This would help gain buy-in from policy teams, give a human face to the work of the Board and necessitate

the development of more effective tracking and communication mechanisms throughout the department. This would need to be balanced against the bottom-up agenda setting with the Board and good participation practice. The Department and the Minister would need to work with the partners to establish standard methods of communication of children and young people's feedback.

- Increased promotion of the Board within the Department, (for example, via internal departmental publications and communications) would lead to a greater understanding of the benefits of participation, and help officials to develop their 'customer-focused approach' more generally.

## **External Communications**

### **Key Findings**

In the original 'roles and responsibilities' document, a key area of joint responsibility was to agree methods for communicating the Boards activities to a wider audience including via the media and at external events.

Initial early promotion of the Board for recruitment purposes was successfully implemented via the partners' websites and 'Children Now'. This is discussed in detail in the earlier section on recruitment. A page in 'Children Now' also promoted the EC event that a young board member attended at which they met Tom Jeffrey's.

The set up paperwork also clearly states that all communication about the Board had to be agreed with the Department. During the year, partners report that the DfES stipulated that they wanted to lead on external communications. Feedback from all stakeholders is consistent in reflecting limited use of the media to promote the Board. All stakeholders view this as a missed opportunity.

Children and young people in particular voiced confusion to the consultants during the final residential when they talked about their regional work. They were surprised that adults and children and young people in their regions had not heard about the Board. Greater use of the media and publicity about the Board would enable members to more easily access local groups, children and young people, and therefore make their regional work easier. Promotion of the Board and the work of the partnership in demonstrating best practice principles in participation would not only have raised national awareness but would also have positively highlighted the efforts of a key government department in actively involving children and young people.

### **Improvements to external communications**

- An external communications strategy needs to be developed for any follow-on initiative for all the reasons cited above. If this were to happen then the resourcing levels would have to be planned accordingly.

- Board members could be actively involved in developing this strategy as well as writing copy for journals and websites or being trained as 'media spokespeople' on behalf of the Board and the DfES.
- The Expert Resource Group could be reconvened to assist in developing more instant avenues for promoting and profiling the Board. This would help children and young people at a local level to engage more with the Boards work and to access local groups.
- The DVD currently being developed could provide an excellent opportunity to develop a communications strategy to highlight the achievements of this year's Board and the expectations for the future. Regular updates about the Board's work could be communicated via partner's websites and via youth media and professional publications such as Young People Now.
- External communications across government should be a key element of a strategy to raise awareness of children and young people's involvement in policy development and consolidate their impact on a range of cross cutting issues.

## 5.5. NCB, BYC and the DfES working in partnership

### Overview

This evaluation report details all the activities of the partners and how it relates to planned activity. Many issues in relation to the partnership working have been highlighted in earlier sections including; staffing, communication between partners, time pressures, need for regular meetings etc. These are not reiterated here. This section will focus on particular issues in relation to the three partners and their involvement in delivering outcomes for the project.

The original 'roles and responsibilities' document places the overall responsibility for the management of the Board with the Children's Views and Interests Team (the partners being responsible for the operational aspects). The DfES 'contracted out' the operational aspects of the Board because the capacity and specialist knowledge that the external partners could bring to the project would be beneficial to the success of the pilot. In addition, NCB and BYC bought a 'high level of credibility and expertise' around facilitating children and young people's involvement and personal development.

### Key Findings

The DfES are clearly very impressed with the work of the partners. They highlight in particular the work of the Board Co-ordinator and BYC staff in developing excellent practice around involvement.

The NCB/BYC partnership has consistently delivered to a high standard on all the key objectives outlined in the original paperwork. In particular, there is no question about the partners' achievements in relation to developing the Board's ability to engage very quickly with government policy. Critical to this process was the well designed and delivered training and support plans put in place for each individual member of the Board. All stakeholders reported a clear respect for the huge amount of work carried out 'behind the scenes' by the Board Co-ordinator and BYC staff to ensure that all the partnership objectives were met.

In terms of the overall delivery objectives of the partners, the two areas that stand out as being slightly weak in terms of anticipated impact have been identified and explained as follows;

- The training of DfES officials

The original aims given to the partners for this area of work were met; the evaluation was extremely good and the training was well received. However, the recruitment aspect, handled by the DfES let the training down. Key policy members did not attend and instead sent other members of staff in their place. This limited the impact of the partners work within this area of their delivery.

- Advising DfES officials on how children and young people can be effectively included in policy development and decisions both within DfES and across government.

The partners did liaise with policy officials on how they could effectively involve children and young people wider than the Board in policy developments. In addition, the Board Co-ordinator helped the teenage pregnancy unit to look at how they could recruit a young person to their adult advisory group and other departments who filled in policy templates (but were not chosen to consult with the Board) were helped to look at additional methods of engagement. This however, appears not to have had a strategic impact across the department and government in terms of bringing the DfES closer to developing a culture of participation.

In both examples, the consultants identified that it was the limited capacity of the DfES (during a substantial part of the project) to deliver consistently on its own objectives and tasks associated with its part of the three-way partnership which weakened the impact.

As part of the 'bigger picture' of the project, the DfES's role was to prepare the way and 'create the conditions' whereby this government department undertook all the necessary work to develop the mechanisms and culture needed for it to engage effectively with children and young people and involve them in policy development. The partners' role was to support this process via the training for officials and provision of advice on participation. Whilst in fact the quality of the training and advice provided was very high and delivered successful learning for participants (reflected in their feedback) the impact of this learning on other departments outside the context on the CYB is unclear and beyond the scope of this evaluation.

Feedback from stakeholders suggests that a key area of work that is missing here is the overall strategy for participation across the department's work that provides the context within which the Board sits and can successfully contribute and operate. The consultants believe that the responsibility for limited success in some areas of partnership working rests with the DfES and their overall management of the project. There are clear, valid and understandable reasons for this, which have been reflected in stakeholder feedback.

Without serious consideration of these issues there will continue to be a risk (which has been reflected by stakeholders) that the Board will remain a 'bolt-on' mechanism, rather than having a distinct and ongoing role in bringing about cultural change within the DfES.

### **Improvements to the partnership working**

- The original vision for the investment in the Board has been met and the project has demonstrated that the involvement of children and young people within the very heart of government is valuable and achievable. However, in order for this project to be more successful in the future, the DfES needs to review and restate its vision for the Board and its involvement in policy making. It was felt

that at times the Board tries to do too much and be 'all things to all people'. The Board cannot be the only mechanism that the DfES develops to foster a participative culture.

- Following clarity in vision for the Board and a clear statement about the level of involvement and therefore the mechanisms needed to support this, the DfES need to think about creating a fully resourced team to focus on managing the project and build its own capacity to 'create the conditions' internally for a participative culture, if indeed, this is what it wants.
- The Board will only be one element of a wider participation strategy for the department. It would be a brave step for the DfES to be ambitious in its vision for participation and include the Board as one key element.

## 6. Key strategic recommendations

### Overview

In this section, the consultants present the key strategic recommendations following an in-depth analysis of the improvements suggested by all the stakeholders who have contributed to this evaluation.

These recommendations are viewed as strategic in the sense that they do not seek to reiterate the level of detail contained in the previous sections of the report. Presented here are the 'big picture' recommendations based on both this evaluation and an analysis of participation practice nationally.

Upfront the consultants believe that it is of the utmost importance that the DfES, in partnership with the NCB and BYC, take the time to reflect on the detailed contents of this report and use it to inform decisions about what they can realistically do to achieve a strategic and planned approach to working with the Board in the next year.

There is no doubt that the Board has been a life changing experience for all its members, and that this second year of the pilot has been very successful. This year has enabled an excellent model to be developed where children and young people have engaged at the heart of government, however there are key developments that need to be planned and implemented that will take this from being a very good project, to being an exemplar.

The DfES intends to work with the same Board for the next six months as a 'holding measure' and the consultants would strongly recommend that this time is utilised as a period for 'action planning' for the future running of the Board. This process would greatly benefit from actively involving either an action subgroup or all CYB members.

This process would use as its starting point the key findings from the report and engage all stakeholders in solution focussed planning. This is not about revisiting what worked and what didn't work, as this is clear from the evaluation, but rather, time needs to be taken to define and agree the next steps to address the main areas of weakness and actively involve children and young people in creating the best possible DfES Board.

Each step, once identified, needs to be assigned to a lead organisation or individual within those organisations with clear timescales. Work plans should be developed to implement suggestions based on this report and a monitoring and evaluation plan should be devised across the partnership. It is imperative that clear communication strategies are put in place and a commitment to ongoing evaluation of this initiative is secured so that all learning gained and action agreed is adequately shared and communicated to key senior decision-makers. There is a great deal to be gained at this time both in terms of results for the DfES, but also in terms of the ongoing development of participation good practice for the partners. Similarly there is a great deal at stake within this project, not least of all the investment so far of over £500k in the past two years pilot Boards.

The following strategic recommendations should guide the process described above and give an overall focus for the future direction of work in relation to supporting the development of the Children and Youth Board in the future.

### **Recommendation 1**

#### **Disseminate improvements for future practice and strategic recommendations from this evaluation report**

The key findings, improvements for future practice and recommendations found within this report should be cascaded to all relevant staff in the DfES, NCB and BYC.

Cross DfES departmental understanding and buy-in to these strategic recommendations needs to be secured. Staff within the department should be specifically encouraged to develop a clear understanding of the benefits of children and young people's participation within policy making and be encouraged to take ownership of the improvements for future practice. This could be achieved by staff seminars/ workshops involving and or run by NCB and BYC staff, and Board members.

### **Recommendation 2**

#### **The DfES should clarify the vision for the Board and its role as part of a wider departmental strategy for participation**

It is recommended that the DfES address a range of strategic questions at the highest senior levels within the Department. These questions are:

- What is our vision and expectations of a Children and Young People's Board?
- What purpose does the Board serve - for the Minister, for wider policy officials, for both?
- What do we mean by participation?
- What levels of participation do we expect for members of the Board?
- What role is envisaged for the Board; is it part of an overall participation strategy, or is it a sounding board/ focus group structure?
- How will we address the risk of the Board becoming a bolt-on structure which could lack influence in bringing about a culture of participation within the DfES?
- What staffing structure best fits the strategy we want to implement within the Department?

The above questions need to be addressed with due consideration given to any genuine boundaries to participation that the DfES might need to set. It is

appropriate in good participation practices to be clear and 'upfront' about the extent of the Board's involvement in DfES policy and practice and about the desired impact. The DfES should define clearly its 'stance' in relation to participation frameworks and take time to look critically at what it will do to 'create the conditions' and the internal mechanisms that are needed to enable the Department to deliver on its own vision for the Board. Appendix 1 has been written to offer background information on this issue.

Following the clarification of its' vision the Department might want to look at developing a strategy that ensures a stepped approach to setting up a range of youth specific structures, identifying lead champions in each area (building on the success of the existing policy leads), reframing existing consultation processes and drawing all existing initiatives into a 'whole department approach'. The DfES publication, 'Building a Culture of Participation' and the NYA's 'Hear by Right' standards would support the work of planning, monitoring and evaluating ongoing practice. A staff training and development programme would be key to any strategy to support the embedding of good practice participation principles and an understanding of action to bring about a culture of participation.

Clarification on the vision and strategy would necessitate effective planning for the desired impact of the Board on policy making. Being clear about this would enable tracking, evaluation and monitoring mechanisms to be set up within the Department.

The Children's Views and Interests Team might want to think about mechanisms for 'internal charging' of other departments who link into policy consultation with the Board.

There are no 'quick routes' to this work and it is widely acknowledged that work of this nature takes time, commitment and resources. The consultants do believe however that the time is right for such a strategy and that there is a fantastic sense of goodwill and energy for this within the Department and from the partners.

### **Recommendation 3**

#### **Develop a good practice model of Board management**

The consultants feel that close inspection of this report and development of strategies to meet these recommendations should happen at the same time as the development of a good practice model for Board management. This model should be developed in conjunction with NCB/BYC and children and young people during this holding period of the next six months.

Time to 'fine tune' the model for the Board should be given to ensure that all structures, systems and paperwork developed for the project are brought together into a central manual to ensure that all learning is captured. This manual could be cascaded to other government departments and participation leads within regional Government Offices who may wish to replicate the model. It could also be used to inform future contractors and define contractual specifications.

## **Recommendation 4**

### **Review and clarify the ‘partnership’ roles and responsibilities and key structures for the delivery of the Board**

The consultants recommend that the DfES and partners review all expectations of a commissioning model to deliver the Board both in terms of what implications it has for the department, as well as any organisation(s) it commissions to deliver the operational aspects of the Board in the future.

Key issues to address include:

- Clarification and agreement on terms of reference or engagement.
- The allocation of more staff to the project, by both the partners and the DfES.
- Expectations of delivery agencies and contract specifications should be reviewed in line with improvements suggested within this report. Particularly attention should be given to what is expected from each partner, what each partner needs in terms of resources and expertise to enable them to fulfil their role, where the gaps are and what resources are needed to fill them, and finally who will lead in what area.
- Each area of operations and management needs a workplan/strategy that lays out clearly how all partners will co-ordinate their efforts with timescales and resourcing levels. These plans need to be reviewed at least quarterly, so that any weak areas or those in need of extra attention are identified at the earliest possible moment and addressed satisfactorily.
- In light of the above work, it is further recommended that the ‘roles and responsibilities’ document is reviewed and redeveloped. A tight specification around operational delivery needs to be in place, in particular to ensure adequate staffing levels to deliver on all outcomes.
- Other areas that need to be addressed are the roles and responsibilities of the members Support workers, and whether this structure should be redeveloped into a separately recruited network of professional sessional staff. Similarly, the existence and adequate management of the Expert Resource Group should be reviewed. These two structures are deemed as absolutely key to the successful management of the day to day running of the Board. Finally, issues such as the frequency of Board meetings, residentials and regional clustering should be agreed.

## **Recommendation 5**

### **Involve Board members in operational and management developments**

The work highlighted above and throughout this document would greatly benefit from the input of the existing Board members. All ideas for development of new

systems, communications and tracking mechanisms should be discussed in partnership with children and young people.

### **Recommendation 6**

#### **Develop a communications strategy to ensure best practice principles for all internal and external communications**

This past year has been very successful and these achievements should be communicated to government offices, youth professionals, other youth organisations and children and young people more generally.

A project communications strategy should be developed that takes the above point into consideration as well as developing the internal communication issues highlighted within this report.

It is specifically recommended that investment be put into developing a web based communication system for Board members.

### **Recommendation 7**

#### **Capitalise on the commitment of past and existing Board members**

The past two years pilots have resulted in fifty children and young people being expertly trained and supported to contribute to government policy and decision-making. Keeping in touch with these children and young people should be a priority for DfES in order to track their progress and involve them in future initiatives. Members would value this and would welcome the creation of a network that could facilitate their on-going involvement in the department's work.

## 7. Appendices

### Appendix 1

#### **Theoretical overview of current approaches to participation and relevance to the DfES Children and Youth Board.**

Participation is an interesting and somewhat fluid concept. It is difficult to define and means different things to different people. Whilst there is now a wide acceptance of the value and need for involvement of children and young people in structures, organisations and processes, common concerns and challenges remain; where to start, how to create meaningful opportunities, a fear of tokenism and getting it wrong, uncertainty about how to ensure that participation leads to action, and difficulties in ensuring adequate support and resources.

Children and young people's legal right to participate is enshrined in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child which also places a duty on adults and organisations to 'create the conditions' in which children and young people can claim their participation rights. In practice, this involves creating genuine opportunities for meaningful involvement where there are clear positive outcomes for children and young people, and where they are supported to identify their views and concerns. Guidance has been developed nationally to ensure participation is underpinned by clear principles and values and meets agreed standards with identifiable outcomes. The emphasis is on participation as a process; requiring learning by adults, children and young people, a genuine interest and commitment to empowerment of children and young people, a willingness to listen and adapt, and allocation of specific resources and time.

Participation remains a challenge, which is reflected by the differing approaches that have been pursued over time. The following summarises some of the key thinking and provides a context and background for the DfES Children and Youth Board.

#### **• Ladder of Participation**

Consultation is not the same as participation. The Ladder of Participation (originating with Sherry Arnstein in 1971) was developed by Roger Hart in his 1992 international study of children's participation for UNICEF UK. Hart was concerned that the label of 'children's participation' was assigned to activities that actually restricted children's involvement and influence. Hart defines participation as a fundamental right of citizenship; a process of sharing decisions, the means by which democracy is built and a standard against which democracies should be measured.

The ladder has seven levels ranging from manipulation, decoration and tokenism on the bottom rungs (which for Hart described activities where children do figure but where they cannot exert substantial influence) to child initiated and shared decision-making with adults on the top rungs. In his analysis consultation is most likely to be lower down rather than higher up the ladder as it involves low levels of actual participation, shared decision-making and influence.

Harts key point is that participation can fail when those involved are unclear about the level of participation on offer. This can lead to disillusionment.

• **The ‘Horses for Courses’ model**

More recently, the ladder has been questioned in favour of a model where different ‘levels’ or approaches are appropriate for different situations. David Wilcox adds a key consideration by asking those managing a participation process or controlling resources to think about and define what ‘stance’ they are going to take regarding participation, and their reason for doing so. Wilcox presents five levels or stances (see figure 1):

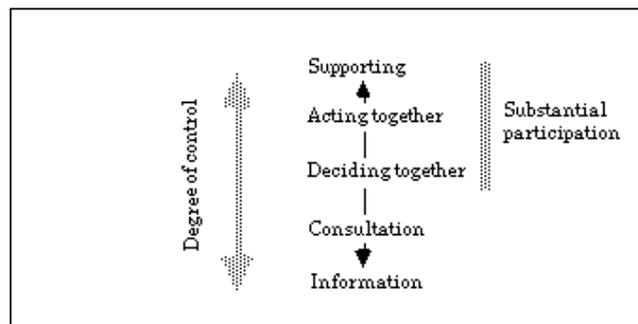
**Information** - The least you can do is tell people what is planned.

**Consultation** - You offer a number of options and listen to the feedback you get.

**Deciding together** - You encourage others to provide some additional ideas and options, and join in deciding the best way forward.

**Acting together** - Not only do different interests decide together what is best, but they form a partnership to carry it out.

**Supporting independent community initiatives** - You help others do what they want - perhaps within a framework of grants, advice and support provided by the resource holder.



**Figure 1**  
Wilcox describes participation as a process in which people have to think through what they want, consider options, and work through what should happen. It is also essential to clarify the purpose of participation because that will determine

which ‘stakeholders’ benefit. Participation, he suggests, may work best for all concerned when each of the key interests (‘the stakeholders’) is satisfied with the level of participation at which they are involved. Those stakeholders that don’t have much at stake may be happy to be informed or consulted. Others will want to be involved in decisions and possibly action to carry them out.

The consultants present Wilcox's five levels of participation as a possible vehicle to assist the DfES in defining their stance in relation to the involvement of children and young people in the Board and in possible future activities.

Children and young people have expressed a desire to be more involved. For some this is expressed as a desire to give more time to Board related activities for others this is greater involvement in decision-making related to running the Board and for a few it is about meeting more regularly with the Minister and having a greater role in policy work.

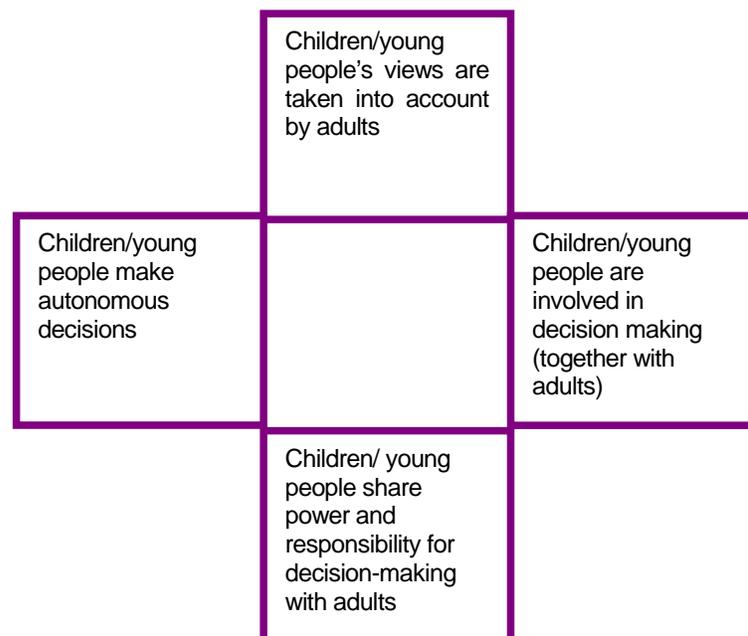
### • Building a Culture of Participation

Recent DfES Research, 'Building a Culture of Participation', which explores the involvement of children and young people in policy, service planning, delivery and evaluation, introduces another key issue, namely that undertaking meaningful and sustainable participation requires organisations to change.

The research defines participation as a multi-layered concept and reiterates that meaningful participation is a process and not simply the application of isolated participation activities or events. It argues that children and young people's views need to influence change and when acted on will have positive outcomes. There are different cultures of participation and organisations need to be clear about their reasons for undertaking participation and how they want to develop it.

Drawing on earlier work (discussed above) a four level categorisation for current participation practice has been devised within this DfES research. This model takes Article 12 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child as its starting point and so does not include consultation or participation activities in which children's views do not have any influence on decisions. Appropriate levels are determined according to circumstance and those involved (See figure 2).

Figure 2



**Children and young people's views are taken into account:** whether volunteered or sought by adults, children's views need to be taken into account if their rights are to be respected under the UNCRC. The information children and young people provide is one source, amongst others, that adults use to make a decision.

**Children and young people are involved in decision-making:** at this level children and young people are actively involved at the point where decisions are made. Children, young people and adults share views and discuss issues together. Adults hold ultimate responsibility for deciding the course of action, but children and young people are involved in steering it.

**Children and young people share power and responsibility for decision-making:** the degree of influence is increased. Adults have a commitment to share power and to undertake joint decision-making with children and young people.

**Children and young people make autonomous decisions:** while recognising that often the implementation of these decisions will require input from adults and is ultimately dependent on adult structures, responsibility and power.

Building a Culture of Participation, Research Report, (Kirby, Lanyon, Cronin and Sinclair , DfES, 2003)

The authors recognise that the idea of 'Participation rights' can be difficult and requires an uncomfortable shift for some if not most adults. In this approach, the power balance between adults and children becomes a focus of attention.

## **Summary of key learning points and their relevance to the DfES**

### **Children and Youth Board**

There are several key learning points from the above which are summarised below:

- Effective participation is a planned process in which the key interests agree on the level of participation which is appropriate.
- Participation involves developing agreement on all sides as to what is to be achieved - the outcomes - and how it is to be done - the methods.
- Participation is a process of learning and development for all concerned. It takes time.
- People will only be involved if they understand each other, have the confidence to participate, and can see some point to it.
- The use of short-term methods and techniques for participation requires understanding of the overall process, and skilled application. There are no quick fixes.

- Participation will only be as genuine and meaningful for children and young people as the context and people involved are prepared to be or are able to be.
- Successful participation is built on a culture of listening to children and young people's views and providing opportunities for them to take part and make decisions.
- It needs to be meaningful and ongoing.
- The whole organisation culture and ethos should encourage and support participation.

Critically, the UNCRC places a duty on adults and particularly authorities to 'create the conditions' in which children and young people can claim their right to participate. This involves cultural change and a shift in attitudes within organisations and by people that hold power. Youth participation should result in strengthening the power of children and young people and there is a risk that structures that mimic adult structures rather than facilitate sharing power may in fact neutralise children and young people's power. Rather than children and young people's participation bringing about cultural change they may end up being incorporated into existing structures with the power to influence change being reduced.

It is with this in mind that the recommendations address the need for the DfES to consider the development of the Children and Youth Board as part of a wider Participation Strategy that creates a range of opportunities for all children and young people to participate and contribute their views.

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