



Championing Children and Young People in England

PARTICIPATION STRATEGY

**Ensuring children and young people's voices are embedded in
the work of the Office of the Children's Commissioner**

April 2012 – March 2013

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SECTION 1 – INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

As outlined in our Strategic Plan 2012-2014, the Office of the Children's Commissioner (OCC) promotes awareness of, and prompts others to respond to, the rights, views and interests of England's children. We have a particular focus on children and young people whose voices are otherwise not heard and who form a substantial minority of England's almost 12 million children and young people.

This strategy outlines how Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) - which states **all children and young and people have a right to have their views heard on the decisions that affect their lives and for their views to be taken seriously** - is embedded across all the work of the OCC.

Amplify, the OCC's children and young people's advisory group, has been working with the Children's Commissioner and the office since September 2010. It is through working with them that we have been able to reflect and review on our participation approaches at the OCC. Amplify are at the heart of this strategy and will play a key role in monitoring and reviewing the action plan in Section 5.

Article 12 is complemented and strengthened by the interrelated Articles on access to information; freedom of association and expression; respect for developing capacity; non-discrimination; and safety. They enable the OCC to ensure the experiences and voices of children and young people meaningfully inform, influence and challenge our work and are essential to achieving our vision and mission.



Our Vision

A society where all children and young people are respected and their rights are realised. They shape decisions made about their lives. Supported by adults who champion their rights, they achieve their potential. They are safe, loved, educated, and healthy. They have access to high quality support, especially if they need extra help. Free from all discrimination, they live in homes and communities where their rights are fulfilled, they learn to value and respect those around them and take on responsibilities as citizens. Their lives are developed to the full.

Our Mission

Using our powers and independence, we protect and promote children's rights under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). We champion children's and young people's roles as active, responsible citizens through our work and influence. We challenge adults to ensure that in all decisions about their lives, children and young people's views are asked for, listened to and acted upon. Children and young people recognise that the Office and its work champions their interests and rights. We press English society to ensure positive change for all children and young people, speaking out especially for those whose voices are otherwise not heard.

Our Values

- Participation – ensuring that children’s voices are listened to, particularly those whose voices are otherwise least likely to be heard, and that their views are taken into account in decisions concerning them.
- Positive in promoting the UNCRC – we work to fulfil our purpose, with a sincere desire for better outcomes for all children and young people. We are positive, responding to new challenges and opportunities, taking responsibility for our work.
- Strategic and objective – we know the big picture. We think about how best to make an impact, basing our work on rigorous analysis of the evidence; remaining free of political partiality and working in the spirit of the Paris Principles and General Comment 2 of the UNCRC.
- Equality – the OCC values diversity and respects the dignity of every person with whom we engage. We acknowledge, champion and celebrate diversity, difference, tolerance and open mindedness. We recognise the multitude of views and perspectives held by children, young people and those who influence their lives.



SECTION 2 – PRIORITIES, AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

Strategic priorities

We will support children and young people to have a real impact on the development and implementation of policies locally and nationally by being active, engaged and valued participants in the work of the Office of the Children’s Commissioner at all levels.

We are committed to enabling children and young people to participate in our work, from a strategic level through to their involvement in individual projects. We value the experience and contribution of every child and young person we work with. Their experience and contribution are central to our work.

OCC Strategic Plan 2012-2014

This means children and young people’s views and experiences are embedded in the work of OCC to achieve its three strategic priorities:

1. *Tackling inequality and child poverty through promoting and realising children’s rights.*
2. *Protecting children and young people from exploitation and abuse.*
3. *Running a highly efficient and effective organisation that maximises the resources we have to help children and young people.*

OCC Strategic Plan 2012-2014

Aims

We will report the voices and concerns of children and young people, through Amplify (the Children’s Commissioner’s children and young people’s advisory group), Children’s Commissioner’s Takeover Day, and the active participation of children and young people in all our work programmes.

OCC Strategic Plan 2012-2014

How will we do this?

- 1. Engage and involve the children and young people who are most likely to be affected or influence our work, this will include children and young people:**
 - From vulnerable or marginalised groups e.g. children and young people who are living in poverty or who are homeless;
 - With specific experiences and views e.g. children and young people who have experience of school exclusions or children in care;
 - Whose voices are less likely to be heard e.g. children seeking asylum or children who have been involved in the criminal justice system;
 - Who fall into the protected characteristics of the Equality Act 2010 e.g. disabled children and young people or Gypsy, Traveller and Roma children and young people.
- 2. Identify for each policy or project area the most appropriate and meaningful approach for ensuring the voice of children and young people informs and influences our work**

The starting point will be at the project initiation stage:

At the project initiation stage we will look to what degree we can effectively engage with children and young people. We will aim to provide children and young people with the best information that will enable their voice to be heard in the decisions that affect their lives through considered consultations and meaningful involvement activities. We will increase opportunities for shared decision-making with children and young people, and children and young people initiated and directed projects.

We will refer to and be guided by our 'Wheel of Participation'; inform, consult and involve which is based on Phil Treseder's Degrees of Participation. Using this wheel helps to identify how and to what way children and young people will be involved in any piece of work. It also reflects that it is not always helpful to imply that one level of participation is better than the other - it very much will depend on the project and on how children and young people wish and are ready to engage (see Appendix for diagram).

Specifically this will include:

- Commissioning research and drawing upon existing research;
- Working with Amplify - the Children's Commissioner's children and young people's advisory group;
- Working in partnership with organisations that directly support and work with children and young people;
- Developing and supporting participation projects that facilitate inclusive, sensitive and interactive engagement methods.

Principles - How we will achieve Article 12:

1. All OCC projects and activities are informed and influenced by the views and experiences of children and young people.
2. Relevant, timely recognition and feedback are given to all children and young people contributing to our work.
3. Effective monitoring and evaluation to identify and measure the quality and impact of what we do.



SECTION 3 – ETHICAL PRINCIPLES

This section is included in the OCC Safeguarding Policy 2012

Children and young people are engaged and involved with us in many different ways and on many different levels. For example they may visit our website, email us directly, attend events, gain work experience, support recruitment and procurement activities, take part in research and directly participate in our projects and activities. This includes their involvement in our children's and young people's advisory group, Amplify, and the Children's Commissioner's Takeover Day.

Whenever children and young people work with or reach out to us, we want them to be safe, feel secure and trust that we will do whatever we can to create a listening, supportive and welcoming environment and protect them from harm. Our approach and procedures to safeguarding have been developed with the NSPCC and have informed this strategy and all our participation activities. We will create a climate of mutual respect, where children and young people feel that they will be listened to, and where their concerns about their welfare will be taken seriously.

All participation work with children and young people will be informed by, and explicitly demonstrate, an ethical value framework based on the following principles:


- **Respect for the rights of children and young people:** Projects and research will promote children's rights. No activity or project that breaches, or supports others in breaching, children's rights should be undertaken.
- **Ensuring the voices of children and young people are heard:** Children and young people have the right, under Article 12 of the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) to be listened to when decisions that affect them are made. To support this right, the Office of the Children's Commissioner aims to involve children and young people in the design and delivery of projects wherever possible. Children and young people's views should be represented accurately and faithfully and, where possible, by them directly. We should check back to ensure that we have understood what they have told us and provide an opportunity for them to correct us before we go public.
- **Promoting wellbeing, ensuring safety and avoiding harm:** All Office of the Children's Commissioner projects and activities, including research and participation, ensure the safety and wellbeing of children and young people. Children and young people should feel protected and supported when they are engaged with us. We will recognise the potential for risk or harm arising from our work and strive to prevent this from occurring. These efforts will apply to all those with whom we engage in any capacity.

'Harm' refers to any negative impact on an individual's mental, emotional or physical wellbeing. It can also arise from and include causing people distress, embarrassment or humiliation, anxiety or loss of self esteem. In avoiding harm, we include a responsibility for the physical safety of those involved in a project or activity.

The ethical approach and support needs of children and young people involved in all project and research work for the OCC will be expected to be detailed in tender documents. In respect of safeguarding, these will attend to such issues as:

- Arrangements for the support and accompaniment of young people taking part in an activity;
 - The management of interviews and group sessions which may lead to distress for children and young people; including debriefing and checks at the end of the session;
 - Access to people and organisations offering advice and support to young people.
- **Informed consent, voluntary participation and feedback:** Gaining informed consent is central to any project or research process undertaken by the Office of the Children's Commissioner. Those who participate in research or projects should understand exactly what this involves. They have the freedom not to participate and to withdraw at any time without negative consequences. The OCC will provide feedback to all children and young people who contribute to and support our work.

Consent should be negotiated appropriately with regard to the age and understanding of those involved. OCC general principles are:

- a child or young person's consent is always required
 - if the child is 15 years or under, the consent of a parent/carer is also required
 - when the young person reaches the age of 16, they can consent on their own behalf and do not need the consent of a parent/carer (although we would always prefer to have parental/carer consent and support where possible).
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- **Confidentiality:** The privacy of participants should be respected in all cases except where there are child protection concerns. Adults are responsible for ensuring that information about them will not be passed on unless there is a concern that they or another child are being harmed or are at risk of harm. This explanation of our policy should be given to children and young people at the earliest and most appropriate point of contact.

The anonymity of participants in projects and research through the OCC must be respected and protected and data protection procedures adhered to.

Translators should be subject to a confidentiality agreement where necessary.

- **Equality and diversity:** All research and projects must be developed and conducted with respect and regard to similarities and differences across individuals and groups; these would embrace age, gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, ability, disability, religion, culture, language and personal and family circumstances. This means that those engaged in research and other projects must avoid prejudice, stereotyping, exclusion and discrimination against children and young people (in accordance with UNCRC Article 2).

We work to avoid the further marginalisation of under-represented groups and seek to actively remove barriers that might prevent their participation and facilitate their meaningful engagement with our work. This will be done through considered planning and support for individual and group needs and working in partnership with organisations with specialist knowledge and experience.



SECTION 4 – GUIDANCE FOR WORKING WITH CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

This section is included in the OCC Staff Handbook and the Safeguarding Policy 2012

All staff and adults working for and on behalf of the Office of the Children's Commissioner will benefit from specific guidance that will help them to work with children and young people in a safe, respectful and supportive way. The guidance below has been developed to provide advice which helps to protect children, and also identify any practices which could be mistakenly interpreted. This guidance provides standards which will help all adults to monitor their own behaviour and to identify inappropriate behaviour by others which might raise safeguarding concerns.

Those working for or on behalf of the OCC are in a position of trust - the public expect the highest standards. Adults should be aware that they may be seen as role models by children, and must act in an appropriate manner at all times. This guidance is also underpinned by key legislation and other rules for the protection of children: for example – the forbidding of any sexual relationship with a child encountered through work with OCC, even if they are of or above the age of consent, and that regarding the giving or receiving of gifts.

If in doubt, staff and other adults should always consider how an action or activity may be perceived as opposed to how it is intended.

Below are some specific guidelines on good practice for working with children and young people. They should be implemented within the positive framework of Section 3 above - key principles of ethical practice:

- Always try and plan in advance for meeting and working with children and young people. It will be useful to identify the factors that will assist you in effective planning e.g. ages or access and support needs.
- Always work with children and young people in an open, safe and transparent way. Other adults should always know about the work you are doing with children.
- Do not agree to keep any information relating to the harm of a child or young person confidential. Follow the procedures for reporting concerns.
- Respect children and young people at all times; be aware of showing favouritism, disapproval or prejudice.
- Seek support from your manager if you become concerned about a young person's behaviour to you personally.
- Consider your appearance, and dress appropriately for the task and the age group you are working with.
- Always consider the appropriateness of your language. While the use of humour can help to diffuse a situation, avoid sarcasm, demeaning comments and suggestive remarks.


- Do not smoke or drink alcohol whilst working with children and young people.
- Don't engage in or tolerate any inappropriate activity involving children and young people, whether based on talking or touching or potentially sexually provocative games.
- The focus of the relationship with a child or young person you have met through your work should always remain on the work. The aim should never become to develop that into a friendship or relationship.
- Do not exchange personal contact details, like phone numbers and email addresses with any children and young people you may meet through your work.
- Do not engage with children and young people you have met through your work on social networking sites, e.g. Facebook. Be aware if you have a twitter account that some children and young people may follow you. Make it clear it is a personal account and they should follow the organisational account.
- Always try to meet with children and young people in a work setting but. If you are meeting somewhere else, make sure it is with their parents' or carer's knowledge and consent.
- Never invite or allow a child or young person you have met through your work into your own home.
- Avoid unobserved situations of one-to-one contact with a child or young person.
- Do not offer to transport a child or young person alone in your car. In unavoidable circumstances ensure other responsible adults you work with have been informed and a record is made of the circumstance.
- If you need to comfort a child or young person who has become distressed it is important that you do so in a way which is both age appropriate and respects their personal space. Never act in a way which may be perceived as threatening, intrusive, or over-familiar and check with them before you act.

Some circumstances may arise which are potentially in conflict with this guidance: for example one-to-one contact with a child or giving them a lift in a car. These actions should be subject to discussion with a manager and a record kept of the decision. Staff and adults should always be mindful of situations which may lead them to be in a position which conflicts with this guidance. Staff who breach this guidance outside of these specific circumstances will be subject to disciplinary procedures.



SECTION 5 – ACTION PLAN 2012-2013

Action	Success Indicators	Actions contribute to realising the performance themes as outlined in Business Plan 2012-2013
1. Identifying at the project initiation and planning stage the opportunities and relevant approaches for promoting and achieving Article 12.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Project plans, including for our Inquiries will address where and how Article 12 will be realised. 	<p>PUBLIC OUTREACH AND ENGAGEMENT - to promote children's rights to children and young people – particularly those who are school aged and vulnerable, policy makers and influencers, through our projects and programmes, by providing education and information on children's rights/UNCRC.</p> <p>ADVICE AND INFLUENCE - to realise children's rights by providing advice to relevant bodies and influencing their decision making and/or provision of services to children and young people from a rights-based perspective.</p> <p>INQUIRIES – to realise children's rights by using the unique powers under the Children Act 2004.</p> <p>ORGANISATIONAL EFFICIENCY AND EFFECTIVENESS – to provide value for money in public money spending.</p>
2. Developing and supporting Amplify – the Children's Commissioner's advisory group of children and young people.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Amplify as a whole group will meet three times in the year to support strategic thinking and taking forward their own project to support a key area of our work Secure on-line forum for Amplify to communicate with OCC staff will be operational Working groups will be convened to support specific policy areas on: Safeguarding, Child Rights Impact Assessments (CRIAs) and Children's Commissioner's Takeover Day. 	
3. Developing and sustaining children and young people's participation networks through working in partnership with organisations and stakeholders.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Contacts and relationships developed with partners and stakeholders to support engagement and involvement activities with children and young people from vulnerable and less heard groups, including: children and young people seeking asylum; children in need and in care; children vulnerable to exclusion and NEET; disabled children and young people; children and young people who have experienced youth custody. 	
4. Planning and delivering specific participation activities to realise Article 12 in specific projects and activities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Children and young people engaged and involved at different levels in OCC work. This will include having considered and reflected their views of Government consultations and CRIAs. 	

<p>5. Promoting and supporting Children's Commissioner's Takeover Day (CCTOD) in 2012 and 2013.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contract awarded to organisation to promote and support CCTOD nationally and success indicators achieved. • Amplify involved in planning and supporting CCTOD for OCC. 	
<p>6. Enabling children and young people to be involved in the commissioning and recruitment processes at OCC.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children and young people from Amplify or the participation networks supported to take part in commissioning and recruitment processes of OCC. 	
<p>7. Providing relevant and appropriate recognition and feedback to children and young people and organisations involved in our work.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All young people who take part in our projects to receive appropriate and timely recognition which may include thank you letters from the Commissioner or Deputy Commissioner, certificates and thank you tokens. • Feedback will be given to meet the needs of the individual or group e.g. easy read format reports, through face-to-face meetings, short films etc. 	
<p>8. Producing, analysing and reporting information to help monitoring and evaluation of our engagement and involvement activities.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relevant data on the numbers, backgrounds and protected characteristics as defined by the Equality Act 2010 will be collected and analysed to identify which children and young people we are working with and who we are not reaching. • Opportunities for evaluating the effectiveness of our engagement with children and young people will be developed and implemented with partner organisations and with the children and young people. 	
<p>9. Supporting staff learning and development on engaging and involving children and young people across our work.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased OCC staff's understanding and ability to inform, consult and involve children and young people in their work. 	



SECTION 6 – MONITORING AND REVIEW

The Principal Participation Adviser will have the responsibility for developing implementing, monitoring and reviewing this strategy.

This strategy directly informs the work of all participation support staff at the OCC and their individual objectives are aligned to ensuring the action plan is delivered.

Through the process of quarterly monitoring of the OCC business plan the leadership Team at the OCC will be able to measure performance against the action plan. This will involve engaging and evaluating impact with Amplify, all OCC staff and partner organisations who help us deliver this work.

A summary report on performance of this strategy will be submitted to the OCC Audit and Risk Committee.



SECTION 7 – FURTHER GUIDANCE

We will continue to develop further guidance and resources that supports the development of good and consistent practice across our participation activities and these include on the following areas:

- Voluntary participation and informed consent
- Involving children and young people with criminal records (in line with safeguarding policy)
- Planning for participation
- Rewards and recognition
- Risk assessment process and the risk assessment for the OCC office
- Children's Commissioner's Takeover Day – safeguarding guidance (in line with safeguarding policy)
- Equality and diversity monitoring process
- Partnership working
- The methods of engagement and involvement

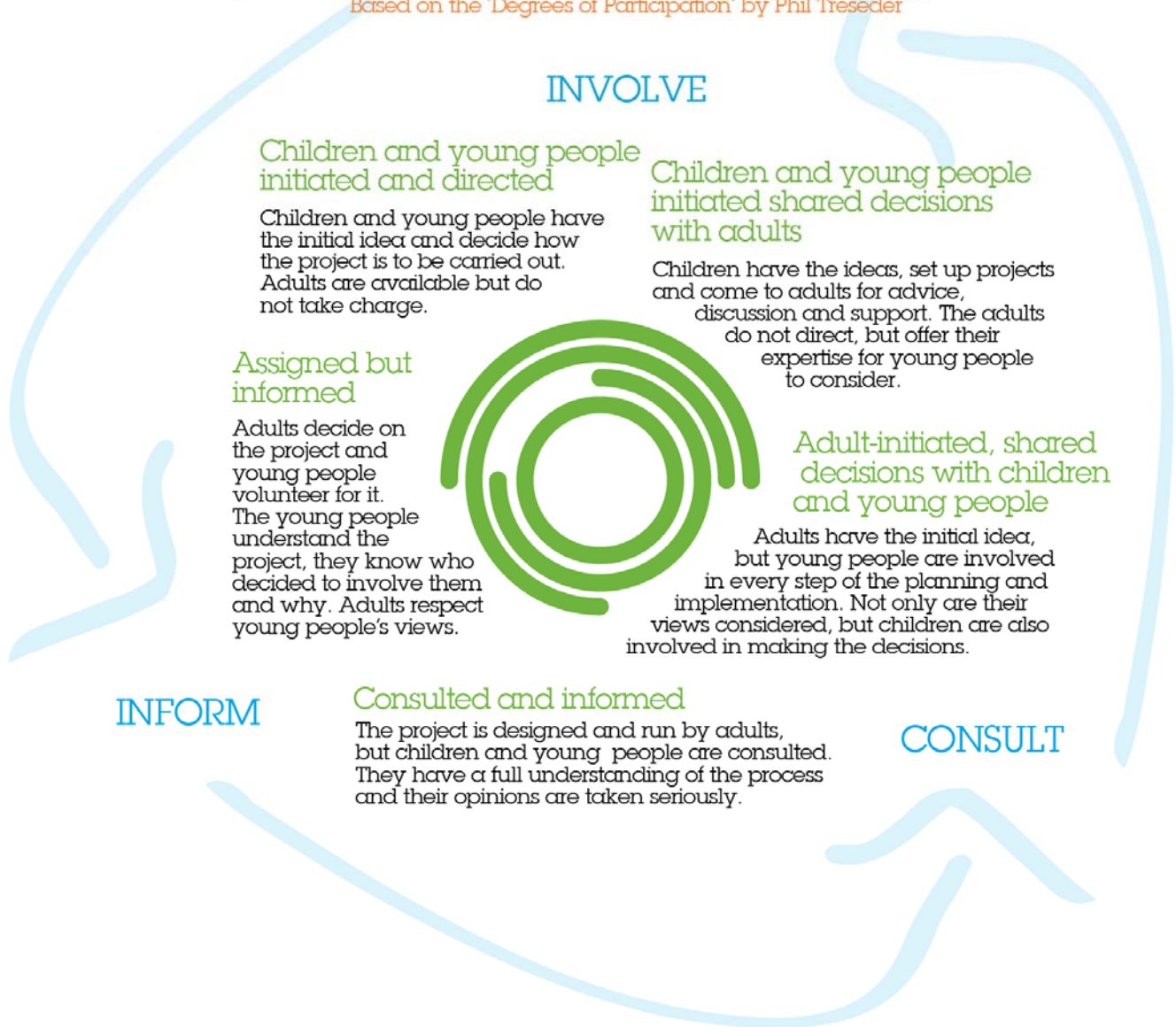
Information on these areas is available through contacting the Participation Team at OCC at info.request@childrenscommissioner.gsi.gov.uk



APPENDIX – WHEEL OF PARTICIPATION

Involving children and young people in decision making...

Based on the 'Degrees of Participation' by Phil Treseder





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