

The participation of children and young people in developing social care.

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Introduction

This guide focuses on how managers and practitioners in social care can initiate and sustain the participation of children and young people in developing their services.

The guide proposes that organisations adopt a whole systems approach to participation. In applying this approach, the four parts of service development that need to be considered are culture, structure, practice and review.

The guide includes key messages from practice (including case studies) and gives details of some of the resources available about participation.

Participation is a flexible and creative process. Each section of the guide contains key messages from research and practice, including case studies, as well as signposts to resources that support organisations at different points on their journey to involving children and young people.



Working with you

SCIE welcomes email or written comments on any aspect of this guide. The feedback will inform future practice guide updates. We are also keen to collect further case studies or examples of good practice in children and young people's participation. You can contact SCIE at www.scie.org.uk.

Authors

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About SCIE

SCIE aims to improve the experience of people who use social care by developing and promoting knowledge about good practice. Using knowledge gathered from diverse sources and a broad range of people and organisations, we develop resources that we share freely, supporting those working in social care and empowering service users.

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About this guide

Introduction

This guide focuses on how social care agencies can develop the participation of children and young people to initiate and sustain change or improvement in their services.

Who the guide is for

The guide is designed primarily for managers and practitioners in social care and draws heavily on the views of young people about how to develop effective participation. The guide will also be useful to everyone involved in promoting children and young people's participation in services that affect their lives.

Why the guide was compiled

The last decade has seen an increasing recognition and acceptance of the right of children and young people to participate in developing social care. Social care organisations have begun to acknowledge that, when listened to, children and young people can play a vital role in the planning and delivery of services.

As a result of this growing acknowledgement, participation has become a key 'target' in many service-level agreements for social care organisations – both voluntary and statutory. At times, this can lead to the participation 'box' being ticked by organisations because they can demonstrate that they have involved children and young people in a specific activity, rather than because they can provide evidence of change or improvement as a result of their participation. This is echoed in SCIE's review of service-user participation (Carr, 2004), which found relatively little in the way of outcome-focused evaluation and a preponderance of process-based evaluation.

This guide offers social care organisations a framework for systematically developing the effective and meaningful participation of children and young people in the design, delivery and review of their services.

How the guide was compiled

To develop the guide, the Barnardo's project team reviewed the research, policy and literature, consulted groups of young people and managers and practitioners across the UK, and identified practice examples (case studies).

In the young people's consultation, a story board exercise was used to prompt discussion about how organisations can develop effective participation. The consultation groups informed the structure and content of the guide and the criteria for the inclusion of the case studies.

The guide draws on knowledge from five sources:

- research, literature and policy concerning children and young people's participation
- the skills, knowledge and experience of Barnardo's Research and Development team, who have contributed to the strategic development of participation within the organisation and created a range of resources to facilitate the participation of children and young people
- the views of practitioners and managers involved in developing participation within voluntary and statutory organisations
- the views of young people from across the UK who have had experience of participating in both voluntary and statutory organisations
- case studies demonstrating the development of participation within voluntary and statutory social care organisations, informed by both practitioners and young people.

Content of the guide

The guide covers:

- key messages
- definitions
- setting the context
- introducing a whole systems approach
 - culture
 - structure
 - practice
 - review

The sections on culture, structure, planning and review set out the essential steps that need to be taken to implement effective participation. These sections contain tool boxes of resources and provide links to examples of participation in practice that are relevant to specific aspects of the implementation processes.

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Key messages

- Adopt a whole systems approach
- Develop a culture
- Develop a structure
- Develop effective practice
- Develop effective review systems

Adopt a whole systems approach

Organisations need to adopt a 'whole systems' approach to participation to affect change or improvement in their services. This approach suggests that there are four parts of service development that need to be considered:

- culture
- structure
- practice
- review.

It is helpful to consider these as pieces of a jigsaw puzzle. Using this model, participation is not about reaching the top of a hierarchy or ladder. It is about putting different pieces of the puzzle together in a way that can support organisations at different points in their journey towards involving children and young people.

Develop a culture of participation

- A culture of participation should demonstrate a commitment to the involvement of children and young people, which is shared and understood by managers, practitioners, children and young people.
- Although frequently identified as a barrier to participation (Hill et al, 2004; Hutton, 2004; Lansdown, 2001), increasing numbers of participation guides (as well as practitioners, children and young people) now acknowledge culture not just as a barrier, but as a legitimate area for service development.
- Culture is not static but something that can change over time. The guide suggests that organisations should consider the following areas of service development to establish an effective culture for participation:
 - establishing a shared understanding of participation
 - ensuring managers actively support and sustain the development of participation
 - ensuring that all staff are committed to participation
 - developing a participation charter
 - showing evidence of participation in organisational policies and documents
 - publicising commitment to participation.

Develop a structure for participation

- It is essential to plan and develop the structures necessary to enable children and young people to become active participants (Wright and Haydon, 2002). Such structures include staff, resources, decision-making and planning processes.
- Even where organisations are committed to a culture of participation, they do not always change their ways of working as a result (Hutton, 2004; Cutler and Taylor, 2003). Participation can only create change or improvement when children and young people can influence decision-making processes.
- The guide suggests that organisations should consider the following areas of service development in order to establish effective structures that support participation:
 - development of a participation strategy
 - partnership working
 - identification of participation champions
 - provision of adequate resources for participation.

Develop effective practice for participation

- For children and young people to become involved, practitioners need to be able to work in a way which enables participation and ultimately affects change or improvement within the organisation. Practitioners and their managers' awareness of the benefits of participation may assist in this process. They are often motivated to work in social care because they want to improve children and young people's lives: A participative approach may help them to achieve this aim by ensuring that their ways of working are based on what is important to children and young people. It may lead to improvements in skills, knowledge and job satisfaction.
- Poor participatory practice is frequently cited as an obstacle to participation. Good practice on a day to day basis is essential in ensuring that children and young people have a positive experience of becoming involved and are able to affect change within the organisation.
- Many social care organisations demonstrate a great deal of positive practice which has enabled the involvement of children and young people. It is important that this practice is recognised and shared.
- The guide suggests that the following key practice points should be considered so that children and young people can be actively involved in both collective and individual decision-making:
 - involvement of all children and young people, which means involving children and young people from different age groups, including young children, and children and young people from specific groups, including those who are seldom heard – such as disabled and black & minority ethnic children and

- young people, those in rural areas, those who are homeless, asylum seekers and refugees, and young offenders
- ensuring the safe participation of children and young people
- creating an environment for participation
- using flexible/creative approaches
- understanding the different mechanisms for involving children and young people in both the operation and the strategic development of an organisation, as well as individual decision-making processes
- providing opportunities for both practitioners and children and young people to develop the necessary skills, knowledge and experience.

Develop effective systems to review participation

- In this guide, 'review' means the process of monitoring and evaluating the participation of children and young people.
- Review is a way of recording how children and young people have been actively involved and, more importantly, how participation has helped change or improve social care services.
- There is a clear gap in evidence to show how participation has helped change or improve social care services. More work is needed in this area.
- The guide proposes that organisations need to consider the following elements when reviewing participation:
 - identification of proposed outcomes
 - involvement of children and young people
 - resourcing review systems
 - establishment of systems to provide evidence of the process of participation (i.e. what the organisation is doing to involve children and young people) as well as the outcomes of participation (i.e. what has changed within the organisation as a result of involving children and young people).
- Children and young people need to participate actively and meaningfully in all these activities from start to finish. They should be involved in defining the aims, objectives, processes, outcomes, and ways and means of measuring success.

Definitions

A shared and consistent definition of 'participation' is difficult to achieve. For the purposes of this guide, it is defined as:

- **Children and young people's involvement in individual decisions about their own lives, as well as collective involvement in matters that affect them.** This guide encompasses both individual and collective participation because the organisational principles that underpin both types of participation are the same.
- **A culture of listening that enables children and young people to influence decisions** about the services they receive as individuals on a day-to-day basis, as well as how those services are developed and delivered for all children and young people who access them.
- **Not an isolated activity, but a process by which children and young people are enabled to influence change within an organisation.** By viewing participation as a process, this guide acknowledges that different organisations can be at different stages of developing participation.
- **Not a hierarchy where the 'aim' is to reach the top of the ladder** (Hart, 1992). This guide accepts that different levels of participation are valid for different groups of children and young people and at different stages of an organisation's development, as illustrated in Treseder's circular (rather than graduated) model of participation (Cutler, 2003).

Setting the context

Increased recognition of children and young people's participation

A number of factors have contributed to the increased recognition of children and young people's participation in the UK.

Policy recognition of the rights of children and young people

Thomas (2000) suggests that the 1989 Children Act for England and Wales 'opened the way for principles to begin to be established that gave children an increasing influence on the outcome of decision-making'. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), ratified by the UK Government in 1991, was the first piece of international legislation to acknowledge that 'children are subjects of rights rather than merely recipients of protection' (Lansdown, 2001). Article 12 of the Convention states that children and young people have the right to express their views freely in all areas that they are involved in, and that these views should be listened to.

Subsequent legislation in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland has reiterated this commitment to children and young people's participation. The Care Standards Act 2000 identifies the importance of their participation, and the regulations and associated standards require that information about services be made available to children and young people in a variety of accessible formats. In addition, legislation regulating social care procedures – such as assessments, child protection conferences and reviews, family group conferences and looked-after children's reviews – all identify the involvement of children and young people as a key priority.

In England, the Children and Young People's Unit (established in 2000 and now integrated into the Department for Education and Skills) produced *Learning to listen: Core principles for the involvement of children and young people*, and each government department was encouraged to develop its own participation action plan. In 2003, the green paper *Every child matters* was launched (with an accompanying young people's version). This emphasised the government's commitment to involving children and young people in planning, delivering and reviewing policies and services that affect them.

In Northern Ireland, a 10-year strategy for children and young people (and informed by them) was drafted in 2004. The Children (Scotland) Act 1995 emphasises the importance of ensuring that young people have an opportunity to participate in decision-making processes. In Wales, the Welsh Assembly has adopted seven core aims to ensure that the UNCRC underpins all policy and practice relating to children and young people (Fajerman et al, 2004).

This commitment across the UK has been further evidenced by the establishment of posts for a commissioner for children in all four jurisdictions.

Children and young people's participation – a central priority for government initiatives

Since the increased government recognition of participation, rafts of initiatives have included children and young people's participation as a key priority. The Quality Protects initiative for looked-after children and young people, introduced in 1998, provided one such example. Key to this initiative was the belief that local authorities could only develop their services effectively by listening to children and young people.

In England, the Children's Fund, Sure Start and Connexions initiatives all echo this sentiment, requiring services to demonstrate how they have included the views of children and young people in their development and delivery.

Participation as integral to children and young people's protection

The recent series of high-profile child protection cases has led to acknowledgement that 'prevailing attitudes towards children, based on the view that adults both know best and will act in their best interests, have failed many children' (Lansdown, 2001). Acceptance of the UNCRC, however, has encouraged services to recognise children and young people as members of society who have the right to be listened to as well as protected. This shift in emphasis 'requires working with children and young people rather than for them, understanding that acquiring responsibility for someone does not mean taking responsibility away from them' (Kirby et al, 2003).

The Scottish Executive's protecting children and young people: Framework for standards (2004) emphasises the importance of actively involving children and young people to ensure their protection. It includes a charter that asks professionals to 'speak with', 'listen to' and 'involve' children and young people.

Children and young people's recognition of their right to participate

It is not only adults who are beginning to recognise the importance of children and young people's participation. Groups such as the former National Association for Young People in Care (NAYPIC) have repeatedly challenged adult presumptions to exercise choice on behalf of children and young people (McNeish, 1999).

Although much research refers to children and young people's disillusionment with political engagement, a wealth of evidence suggests that they have both the desire and the ability to influence decisions that affect them in their everyday lives. A survey of 663 young people (Park et al, 2004) found that the majority of young people thought that they should have, at the very least, 'quite a bit of a say' in making decisions about issues that affect them.

Introducing a whole-systems approach

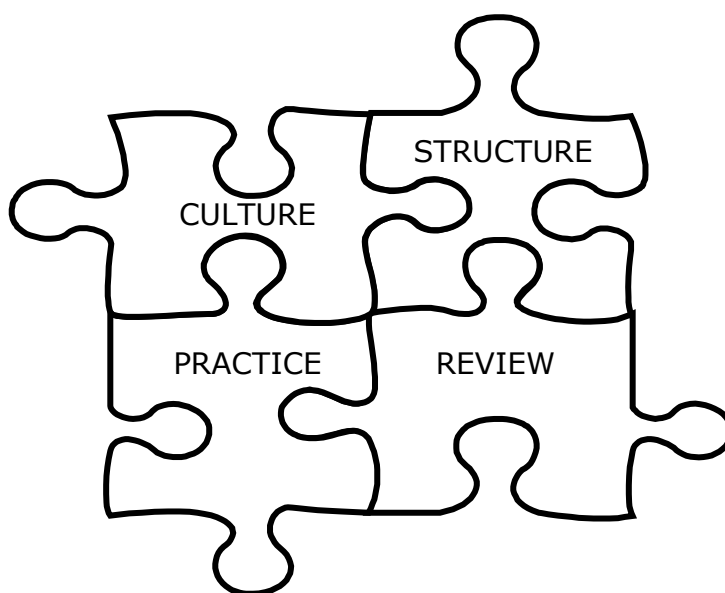
As Kirby et al (2003) suggest, organisations that demonstrate successful participation are those that recognise that it reaches 'beyond specific events to include a whole overarching approach'. Recent guidance and research has reiterated this need to establish a whole-systems approach to ensure that the participation of children and young people affects change.

This guide proposes that there are four elements which need to be considered to ensure that a whole-systems approach is established:

- Culture
- Structure
- Practice
- Review

By considering these four components of service development and delivery, children and young people's participation is more likely to result in change or improvement of social care services.

The four areas are depicted as four pieces of a jigsaw puzzle. This structure does not offer an alternative to previous models of participation. Instead it aims to bring together the overarching themes from the literature into one framework. As developing effective participation across an organisation is not a linear process, the jigsaw demonstrates how each of the four elements can be considered separately or added to the puzzle in different sequences to produce the same outcome – the change or improvement of organisations.



Culture: the ethos of an organisation, shared by all staff and service users, which demonstrates a commitment to participation

Structure: the planning, development and resourcing of participation evident in an organisation's infrastructures

Practice: the ways of working, methods for involvement, skills and knowledge which enable children and young people to become involved

Review: the monitoring and evaluation systems which enable an organisation to evidence change affected by children and young people's participation

Culture

- What culture means
- Why culture is important
- Developing a culture
- Establishing a shared understanding
- Ensuring managers support the development of participation
- Developing a charter
- Evidencing participation
- Publicising commitment

What is meant by 'culture'?

Culture refers to the ethos of an organisation. A culture of participation should demonstrate a commitment to the involvement of children and young people – shared by managers, practitioners, children and young people.

Why is culture important?

Culture has frequently been identified as a barrier to participation. As Davies and Marken (1998) suggest 'our popular and official culture in deeply embedded ways defines young people as too uninformed, unreliable and untrustworthy to carry responsibility.'

There is a fear that somehow children are going to ask for terribly wrong things or say the wrong thing. On the one hand, you want to give them a voice, but on the other hand, you don't want them to say anything that goes against what the organisation believes in.

Practitioner

This issue may be particularly relevant for staff in health and social welfare services who have a statutory responsibility to safeguard children. In this context, the vulnerability – rather than the capacity and resilience of children and young people – may be emphasised. Hill et al (2004) suggest that one of the foremost barriers to

participation is 'adults' perceptions, including their images of children's capacities, and their self-interest in maintaining their own position with respect to children'.

Traditionally social workers go into social work because they want to care and feel valued and depended upon. They have a notion that a service user is a client and they are professionals, rather than that they are entering into a partnership with them.

Practitioner

The challenge is to strike a balance between implementing a children's rights perspective, including the right to be heard and listened to, while continuing to offer appropriate care and protection. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) acknowledges the need for this balance by granting children the right to be protected as well as the right to participate (Hutton, 2004).

A growing body of literature also refers to the 'culture of disaffection' that exists among children and young people due to the 'government's failure to respond to their specific needs and by policies which have eroded rights which they have previously held' (Lansdown, 2001). Adults need to acknowledge that these feelings of disillusionment exist before they can move forward and develop a positive culture of participation within their organisations.

Increasing numbers of participation guides now acknowledge culture not just as a barrier but as a legitimate area for service development. This is reflected in the NSW Commission for Children and Young People's Guidance on Participation (2004), which states that 'for participation to be effective, it needs to be part of the belief system of the organisation.' A recent mapping of children and young people's participation in England (Oldfield and Fowler, 2004) found that, where respondents strongly agree that children and young people have a right to participate, they were more likely to acknowledge that children and young people 'have a great deal of influence in their organisation'. This finding suggests that, in many cases, an organisation's positive attitude and commitment towards the involvement of children and young people may, in turn, lead to participation that will, in turn, effect greater change within that organisation.

Developing a culture of participation

Participative cultures develop differently in different organisations, depending on where they are in the process of instigating participation, how they intend to involve children and young people and their current cultural climate. For this reason, the development of a participative culture is not a static concept; it is something that changes over time depending on the nature of an organisation's work.

Rather than providing a rigid framework that all organisations must follow in the same way, this guide discusses what needs to be considered when developing a culture of participation.

Establishing a shared understanding of participation

To create a culture of participation, managers, practitioners, children and young people need to have a shared understanding of participation and what this means for social care services. To achieve this, they need to have a clear understanding about what participation means to them and the potential impact it could have. As Treseder (1997) states: 'Many attempts to involve children and young people end in frustration precisely because the implications of empowerment are not properly considered from the start.'

Developing a culture of participation should therefore involve discussion between practitioners, managers, children and young people on:

- defining participation
- understanding why participation is important
- understanding current organisational culture.

Defining participation

A lack of understanding about participation would undermine any potential work.

Practitioner

Participation has become a 'buzz word' in children and young people's organisations, but definitions of it vary from organisation to organisation. It can be a confusing task to identify a shared understanding of participation, especially when organisational definitions often differ from those offered by partner agencies or funders. A definition of participation should help clarify what an organisation is trying to achieve by developing participation. As Save the Children and the Children's Rights Office (1997) collectively state:

If an organisation chooses to encourage participation, colleagues must first agree on aims, objectives and accepted outcomes, and everyone must understand how far children will be involved in the decision-making process. Failure to establish these fundamentals will almost certainly lead to failure of the overall project.

In clarifying these aims and objectives, the organisation should identify what will be achieved or changed, for whom, when, how and by whom. An effective definition of participation will therefore encompass an understanding of participation as an activity and as a process that aims to achieve positive outcomes for children, young people and organisations.

Issues to consider when developing an organisational definition of participation, as identified by practitioners

- Is the definition relevant to everyone – that is, to both young people and adults – at all levels within the organisation?
- What is the definition seeking to encapsulate – participation as a theory, process and/or model?
- How will the definition be shared and evidenced throughout the organisation’s policy and practice?

Although the process of establishing a shared definition of participation can be challenging, once it has been identified, an organisation can benefit from a consistent understanding of participation that enables the development of a shared set of values.

Understanding why participation is important

To make an informed decision about whether or not to commit to participation, adults, children and young people need to understand why participation should be integral to the organisation. This can be achieved by:

- **becoming aware of the legislative requirements of participation:** Both staff, children and young people should know about relevant guidance about participation, including guidance on legislation and from government departments/initiatives and regional objectives relating to participation.
- **understanding the benefits of participation:** Information regarding the benefits of participation for the organisation and for children and young people will also provide evidence of why participation is important. As Kirby *et al* (2003) state, the fact that 'participation is part of international law or public policy is not always enough to convince those who work with children and young people to engage in this work.'

Practitioners and young people have identified a number of benefits of participation:

Benefits for young people	Benefits for the organisation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learn new skills and gain experience • Enjoyment • Develop self-confidence • Opportunity to influence decisions that affect their lives • Opportunity to develop social networks • Feel valued and empowered • Opportunity to develop better understanding of how organisations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Services become more responsive to the needs of children and young people • Can begin to challenge presumptions about the needs of children and young people • Become more accessible to children and young people • Become more efficient as they are providing a more effective service for

operate and make decisions.	children and young people.
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See Resource tool box: Establishing an understanding of why participation is important.

Understanding current organisational culture

When people say that they have worked for two years to get a lapel badge that says they are a member of a particular institution and then someone is telling them that a group of young people can make a decision equally to them it puts their noses out of joint.

Practitioner

The barriers to participation include practitioners' concerns about its impact on their work. They may feel that their work will change or even that their jobs will be under threat. These concerns need to be acknowledged, discussed and repackaged so that all staff appreciate that children and young people's participation can increase staff skills, knowledge and job satisfaction. Practitioners often enter the social care field because they want to improve people's lives. Participative approaches are a way of ensuring that their work is based on what is important to children and young people.

Children, young people and adults all need to understand the current decision-making processes within their organisation so that they can recognise where power currently lies and identify what may need to change. As Kirby *et al* (2003) suggest: 'Increasing children and young people's participation within organisations is a political process about shifting power relationships.' Integral to this is agreement between staff and young people about where the boundaries of the latter's involvement should be: which decisions and actions are actually open to change and to what extent young people can be involved in the whole process or part of it. The National Youth Agency (2004a) suggests that there are 12 'tough questions' that adults need to ask themselves when they are planning to develop participation within their organisation:

1. What are we aiming to achieve?
2. Where have we got to so far?
3. What will children and young people get out of it?
4. Are we prepared to resource it properly?
5. Why have we not done it before?
6. Are we prepared to involve children and young people from the start?
7. Are we being honest with the children and young people?
8. What are our expectations?
9. Are we prepared to give up some power?
10. Are we prepared to take some criticism?
11. Do we recognise this as a long-term commitment?
12. Are we prepared to build in changes long term and not just have a one-off event?

By answering these questions, adults will help clarify both their current and their future commitment to participation and, as a result, identify how their culture needs to change and develop. Discussion about the structural and practical barriers to participation within the organisation may also enable managers and practitioners to identify what needs to be done to create a more effective culture for participation.

Structural and practical barriers, as identified by practitioners

- Lack of funds and/or resources
- Adult decision-making structures that exclude young people – for example, formal board meetings during school hours
- Lack of understanding about what participation means
- Fear about developing new ways of working
- Lack of knowledge about how to communicate effectively with young people
- Lack of opportunities to work directly with young people and develop effective relationships.

See Resource tool box: Understanding current organisational culture

Ensuring managers support the development

There needs to be a clear lead from management so that there is a clear direction and all staff know that it is something that they all need to be doing.

Practitioner

The development of a culture of participation can encompass a great deal of change for organisations, particularly in terms of the redistribution of power in relation to decision-making processes. Hill et al (2004) suggest that there is a common view of children's rights as 'undermining adults' authority and rights, with a zero-sum assumption that transferring responsibility to children inevitably takes something away from adults'. The commitment of a manager can ensure that any resistance to this change is addressed and that practitioners are supported and encouraged during the process of transition.

A mapping of children and young people's participation in England (Oldfield and Fowler, 2004) identified that the majority of both voluntary and statutory sector organisations believed that senior management commitment to participation was the most important action that organisations could take to promote children and young people's involvement. Managers play an important role in maintaining participation as a priority on an organisation's agenda and ensuring that it continues to be adequately resourced. Kirby et al (2003) emphasise that practitioners'

commitment to participation is also essential in developing participative cultures and practices, given their day-to-day contact with children and young people.

Developing a participation charter

Many participation guides emphasise the importance of developing a charter or standards for participation on which the organisation's practice will be based. Cutler (2003) defines standards as 'public promises to give a specified quality or level of service'. In Oldfield and Fowler's mapping of participation in England (2004), two fifths of voluntary and statutory sector organisations had a written strategy or policy on involving children and young people. Robson, Begum and Lock's research into developing participation in voluntary organisations (2003) found that 'clear statements about involvement helped start debates or provided a standard against which progress could be measured.'

Once a charter has been established, it should be agreed and signed by each child, young person and adult joining the organisation. Local partner agencies should also be encouraged to agree and sign it. Children and young people should take part in regular reviews of the charter, adapting or altering it as necessary. They are then more likely to be confident about sharing their principles and charter with other young people or agencies trying to establish and develop participation (Wright and Haydon, 2002).

One of the conditions for taking funding is that partner agencies adopt the charter and incorporate it into the articles of their organisation and that they demonstrate that they have done that by the end of the funding period, so hopefully that's a way of breeding a culture of participation.

Practitioner

However, it is important that the process of developing a charter as part of building a participative culture is not viewed in isolation. For a charter to effect change, it needs to be understood in terms of its implications for organisational structure, practice and review. As Cutler (2003) summarises, standards or charters 'should be seen as only one part of a cycle of management and they need to be backed by resources, training, inspection and evaluation.' Cutler also suggests that there are six key issues that need to be addressed to ensure standards are effective:

1. Standards need to be easy to understand, public and testable.
2. The culture and type of organisation needs to be taken into account.
3. Where possible, standards need to build on what is already in use.
4. Failure to meet a standard must trigger action by the organisation.
5. Standards need to link to real outcomes, not just what can be easily measured.
6. Adequate resources need to be made available, including staff time and money for young people's active participation.

See Resource tool box: Developing a charter for participation

See Case study 1, Case study 2, Case study 9, Case study 11, Case study 12, Case study 13, Case study 15.

Evidencing participation in organisational policies and documents

Once a charter has been established, it is important that these principles are reflected throughout organisational documents and policies – for example, job descriptions, strategic plans, policy guidelines and practice manuals.

I think there is an argument for writing a commitment to participation into everybody's job description in an organisation that works with children.

Practitioner

It prevents practitioners being able to argue against wanting to involve young people because they are arguing against the commitment that they've undertaken by taking the job.

Practitioner

The Children and Young People's Unit (2001) suggests that one of the key ways to demonstrate a visible commitment to participation is to refer to children and young people's involvement in all organisational policy and practice, including agreements with partner agencies.

See Case study 1, Case study 2, Case study 3, Case study 5, Case study 6, Case study 7, Case study 8, Case study 9, Case study 13, Case study 15.

Publicising commitment

To demonstrate its commitment to participation and to encourage participatory practice, organisations should publicise how they involve children and young people (Wright and Haydon, 2002). By promoting their practice in this way, they not only demonstrate their commitment to participation to staff and potential partner agencies, but also to the children and young people who access their services.

The young people interviewed for this guide suggested that organisations could produce young person-friendly leaflets and posters that demonstrate how children and young people have been involved, including pictures and quotes from young people themselves.

See Case study 5, Case study 6, Case study 8, Case study 10, Case study 13

Structure

- What structure means
- Why structure is important
- Developing a participation strategy
- Partnership working
- Identifying participation champions
- Providing adequate resources

What structure means

Once participation has been adopted as a central value within an organisation, it is essential to plan and develop the structures necessary to enable young people to become active participants (Wright and Haydon, 2002). This includes considering the planning, decision-making processes and resources needed to develop participation within the organisation.

Why structure is important

The establishment of an effective structure for participation 'provides pathways for children and young people to join in the life of the organisation' (NSW Commission for Children and Young People, 2004). As Matthews states (in Davies and Marken, 1998): 'Poor participatory mechanisms are very effective in training young people to become non-participants.'

Even where organisations have made an overt cultural commitment to greater participation, the required shift in processes and systems often fails to occur. The common consequence is workers who are highly committed to participation operating in the face of persistent, sometimes hidden, organisational barriers (Hutton et al, 2004).

As Cutler and Taylor (2003) suggest, without the appropriate and adequately resourced structures to support the practice of participation, 'there is a grave danger that such policies remain as window dressings.' Organisations, therefore, may demonstrate a strong cultural commitment to participation, but without an infrastructure to support this commitment, participation cannot be properly sustained.

Structures that provide a role for children and young people to influence change and decision-making processes should not be seen as additional 'bolt-on' dimensions, but should be developed as part of an organisation's infrastructure. Clark and Moss (2001) provide examples of organisations that have developed structures to enable children and young people to be listened to. Although they acknowledge that children do not always feel listened to within legal processes, they say that the role of the guardian ad item (with the specific skills and expertise that it brings with it)

has become critical in enabling young people to have a voice in public law proceedings. It is the development of this specific role that has enabled the establishment of clear pathways in which young people's views can be fed into a predominantly adult-focused arena.

Developing a structure for participation

Developing a participation strategy

A strategy or plan is an important structural tool in developing participation across an organisation. It can provide a framework for setting outcomes and outlining the process by which children and young people will have the opportunity to participate.

If you are not very specific about [what you want to do] then it's very difficult for the young people because they don't know what you want them to inform you on and advise you about.

Practitioner

The strategy should be informed by an organisation's knowledge of the different methods of involving young people (see **Practice**) and a clear, shared understanding of why children and young people are being involved (see **Culture**). Kirby *et al* (2003) describe participation as a 'multi-layered concept'. They suggest that at least six dimensions should be taken into account when considering participation:

- 1 level of participation
- 2 focus of decision-making
- 3 content of decision-making
- 4 nature of participation activity
- 5 frequency and duration of participation
- 6 which children and young people are involved.

These six considerations can offer organisations a structure for discussion about the development of a participation plan, in partnership with children and young people. The Taking part toolkit (Wright and Haydon, 2002) provides a framework for developing a participation plan:

- who will be involved
- how children will be selected/elected/encouraged to participate
- who the children and young people will represent
- how children and young people will be involved
- the roles and responsibilities of children and young people
- adults' roles and responsibilities
- how people find out about the effects/impacts of participation.

Although a plan is important in enabling adults and young people to have a clear vision of how young people will be able to effect change within an organisation, Kirby

et al (2003) suggest that planning must remain flexible to ensure that participation remains a dynamic process that can develop and change over time. Therefore, any plan should be reviewed – by adults, children and young people – at regular intervals.

You need boundaries on it and you need to set a limit on expectations and stuff like that, but within that you don't want to set it up so tightly that there is no scope for young people's imagination or creativity to come through and shape it as well.

Practitioner

See Case study 3, Case study 10, Case study 14, Case study 17

Partnership working

Creating partnerships or links with other organisations is an important element in establishing an effective structure for participation. Knowledge of local, regional and national participation initiatives can encourage the sharing of experience and skills, as well as identify gaps and opportunities for partnership working. Kirby et al (2003) summarise how partnership working can contribute to capacity building within an organisation and help catalyse organisational change both internally and externally:

- On-going collaboration with dedicated participation development organisations brings the capacity and experience to develop new work.
- On-going collaboration between different organisations exposes staff to other ways of working and can encourage change in practice.
- Voluntary organisations can have more scope to develop innovative work and be less constrained by statutory policy requirements.
- Consultations and participation initiatives that are jointly funded by different agencies (e.g. health, social services, education) can help to ensure that young people's own agendas are identified and explored, rather than forcing topics to be defined by or relevant to one specific agency.
- Establishing partnerships between services and advocacy organisations helps ensure that young people have an independent advocate in personal and group decisions and that their views are represented in a number of agencies.

Practitioners also identified that partnerships with other organisations can prevent duplication of practice and provide access to a wider group of young people:

Linking with other organisations is vital because it helps you have access to children and young people who you wouldn't have links with otherwise.

Practitioner

One of the benefits of having a network is that you feed into, instead of create, more and more forums for children and young people. It's about identifying what already exists and then identifying these pathways, rather than creating new pathways.

Practitioner

A number of publications now include mapping exercises and case studies of participation practice. These may provide a useful starting point from which to identify potential links or partnerships.

Identifying participation champions

A number of research studies have found that the successful implementation of participation plans is facilitated by the identification/appointment of a member of staff dedicated to the development of participation. The study by Robson et al (2003) of user involvement in voluntary organisations found that 'specialist posts or designated parts of job descriptions that focused on user involvement did give an impetus to communication with users.'

There needs to be someone to drive the participation strategy, there needs to be teams of people who are committed to driving it forward, otherwise it just becomes an add-on.

Practitioner

In Oldfield and Fowler's mapping of participation in England (2004), 43 per cent of voluntary and statutory sector organisations felt that the appointment of specific members of staff to support participation was the most important action that organisations could take to promote participation. This belief was reflected in the fact that three quarters of the organisations said that they provided dedicated staff time to participation – either full-time workers or a designated number of hours per week from specific members of the staff team.

For this role to be grounded in a participative structure, young people should be supported to contribute to the terms of reference and, if it is a designated member of staff, to the recruitment process (see Resource tool box: Involving children and young people in recruitment and selection).

Kirby et al (2003) provide examples of a number of different approaches to developing a structure that encourages the development of participation through specific posts or forums:

- identifying existing staff to become champions for participation
- establishing staff planning groups for participation
- establishing a participation department
- commissioning external organisations and/or working in partnership with others to promote participation
- establishing young people as champions – either providing specific posts for young people to support participation or creating forums by which young people promote participation within an organisation
- employing specialist participation workers.

The Carnegie Young People Initiative survey of the training, support and development of 186 participation workers (Kilgour, 2002) found that participation workers often felt isolated in their roles. It recommended the formation of links with specialist participation networks to provide opportunities for support and shared learning.

Training was also identified as an important area for consideration when developing specific participation posts. Of respondents, 92 per cent said that participation workers should receive training in participation techniques and strategies, and 83 per cent said that they should receive training about evaluating young people's participation.

Issues to consider when developing a participation worker's post, as identified by practitioners

- Develop a clear outline of what you are expecting them to do and how.
- Identify their learning and development needs.
- Allocate a realistic budget.
- Identify who the post is for and how it will be used.
- Decide what level the post will be placed at within the organisation – post-holders need to have enough power to influence strategic developments while remaining 'in touch' with children and young people.

In developing a role for a participation champion, it is important to consider the potential limitations of such a post. There is the risk that, by identifying an individual to develop participation, the responsibility is taken away from all workers within the organisation.

It can make people think that they can just leave it up to someone else so everyone else just pays lip service to participation.

Practitioner

Specific posts are effective in driving forward the participation agenda, especially in organisations that are just starting to develop participation. However, an organisation that demonstrates an effective culture of participation should incorporate a structure that includes definitions of 'participation' and 'listening to children and young people' as key elements in all workers' job descriptions.

See Resource tool box: Identification of 'participation champions'

See Case study 6, Case study 8

Providing adequate resources

I don't think participation can be done on the cheap, it isn't a cheap option, but I think there is an investment in making sure that people have the skills and tools to do it.

Practitioner

As Kirby et al (2003) state, 'It does not cost anything to listen to children.' However, it does cost money to ensure that participation is effectively developed, sustained and practised within an organisation. Cutler and Taylor (2003) state: 'Other than the employment, often part time, of a worker, it is very rare for an organisation to have a dedicated budget for participation.'

Where budgets are evident, they have often been secured on a short-term basis to fund a specific piece of work involving children and young people. As Oldfield and Fowler's mapping of participation in England (2004) suggests, 'There are strong messages ... from both the voluntary and statutory sectors about the need for participation work to be adequately resourced on a long-term basis.' Robson et al's study of user involvement in voluntary organisations (2003) found that 'a specific budget for user involvement activity clearly enabled change.' However, the allocation of this budget has to be appropriately applied for this change to be realised.

Practitioners suggested that, if participation was integral to an organisation's way of working, an additional 'bolt-on' budget should not be required. Instead, current budgets should ensure that they resource children and young people's involvement in decision-making, especially in those services that are meant to be there for children and young people.

Wright and Haydon (2002) provide a summary of the items that need to be considered when developing a budget that enables participation:

- training for staff and young people
- support for staff and young people
- expenses for young people who become involved
- incentives/rewards for young people
- equipment
- space for young people in a child-friendly environment
- budget for specific participation initiatives/events/publicity.

Practice

- What practice means
- Why practice is important
- Developing effective practice
- Involving all children and young people
- Ensuring the safe participation
- Creating an environment
- Using creative/flexible approaches
- Mechanisms for involving children and young people
- Organisational development
- Organisational practice
- Individual decision making
- Competencies required

What practice means

For children and young people to become involved, practitioners need to be able to work in a way that enables participation and ultimately effects change or improvement within the organisation. Organisations, therefore, need to develop the necessary skills, knowledge and experience to enable all children and young people to participate safely and effectively.

Why practice is important

Poor participatory practice is one of the most commonly cited obstacles to participation. This is particularly pertinent in the process of involving individual children and young people in making decisions about their own lives. For example, a great deal of evidence suggests that looked-after children and young people often feel unable to participate effectively in reviews or similar meetings: 'Most children find the meetings boring and some find them unpleasant. They often feel insufficiently prepared to take part and they are hardly ever given the chance of independent advice or representations' (Thomas, 2000).

Adults often fail to acknowledge the need to adapt their ways of working to accommodate children and young people (NSW Commission for Children and Young People, 2004). The establishment of a culture that acknowledges the need for change, plus structures that provide the mechanisms to support this change, may go some way to ensuring that this obstacle is overcome.

However, without the effective practice of individual practitioners on a day-to-day basis, children and young people's participation will fail to effect positive change. In addition, if children and young people have repeated experiences of adults failing to

involve them effectively in decision-making processes, their desire to participate in the future will decline and the principle of participation will be devalued.

Despite acknowledgement that some practice can inhibit participation, a great deal of positive practice within social care organisations has successfully enabled the involvement of children and young people. This practice is often overlooked as organisations become concerned with the complexities of developing participation and meeting legislative targets.

It is important that positive practice is recognised so that practitioners can share their skills, knowledge and experience with both colleagues and external audiences.

I think there is something very important about sharing practice and making sure that people in the organisation have the opportunity to know what other people are doing, because that can work to allay fears.

Practitioner

Developing effective practice

Research relating to participation identifies a number of key issues that need to be considered to ensure children and young people are able to become actively involved in both collective and individual decision making processes.

Involving all children and young people

I wanted to do some recruitment in a school and I said to my contact that I was looking for a mixed group of young people, mixed gender, mixed ability, and I got the head girl, the deputy head girl and someone else who was from the student council.

Practitioner

Participation in decision-making is a right of all children and young people – no matter how great the challenge for practitioners to involve them. Every effort should be made to provide practitioners with the knowledge, time and support to involve all children and young people who access their services. Equally, children and young people should be granted the time, training and support to be able to participate.

Children and young people are often seen as a homogenous group. However, as Beresford and Croft (1993) suggest: 'Different children and children of different ages may be able to participate in different ways and to different degrees, but then the same is true for adults.' Oldfield and Fowler's mapping of children and young people's participation in England (2004) found significant disparities between the levels of involvement granted to different groups of children and young people.

Although respondents reported some success in involving what are often seen as 'hard to reach' groups of children and young people, two thirds of statutory agencies and half of voluntary agencies found it difficult to include specific groups. These groups included black and minority ethnic children and young people, those in rural areas, disaffected children and young people and those who do not access education, training or employment.

Evidence suggests that the following groups of children and young people are frequently excluded from the opportunity to participate in decision-making processes.

Disabled children and young people

There is a belief that some children cannot communicate, and actually that is the first barrier that organisations need to overcome, even before they get to how to communicate.

Practitioner

Disabled children and young people are subject to a high degree of adult intervention, are more vulnerable to abuse than non-disabled children and are more likely to receive medical treatment and to be involved in various assessment procedures about their care (Dickens et al, 2004). For these reasons alone, it is essential that disabled children and young people are routinely involved in both collective and individual decision-making processes.

Although the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) refers to the rights of all children and young people, Article 23 refers specifically to the importance of recognising the right of disabled children and young people to participate. The Framework for the assessment of children in need and their families (Department of Health, 2000) also recognises the need to involve them, emphasising that 'communication with some disabled children requires more preparation, sometimes more time and, on occasions, specialists' expertise.'

Despite this policy recognition, many disabled children and young people continue to be excluded from decision-making processes. Franklin and Sloper's research into the participation of disabled children and young people in social service departments (2004) found that their 'participation is still patchy and involvement at a higher strategic level is rare.' Of the 71 local authorities involved in the study, only 60 per cent reported that they involved disabled young people both in service development and in tailoring individual care packages. Respondents also reported that they felt that they had received insufficient training about communicating with young disabled people.

Practitioners need to be aware of the barriers that disabled children and young people face and provide sufficient time, support and resources to enable them to be overcome. Organisations need to recognise the need for this practice and ensure that

training and resources are available for practitioners to utilise. There exists a wealth of resources about working with disabled children and young people, offering guidance relating to the specific issues that need to be considered, including communication tools and techniques, venues, accessibility and support methods.

See Resource tool box: Participation of disabled children and young people

See Case study 7, Case study 9, Case study 10, Case study 11, Case study 12, Case study 13, Case study 15

Young children

Young children are often excluded from consultations or decision-making, with parents and practitioners making decisions on their behalf. Alderson (2000) provides examples of how babies as young as six months old are able to 'form and express a view' about their immediate surroundings, choice of activities and personal preferences – challenging the perception that it is only older young people who can form opinions or make decisions about their lives.

In practice, there has been an increase in involving younger children – for example, the 'mosaic approach' (Clark and Moss, 2001), which is a way of actively listening to children, has been adapted to work with those under the age of two. However, younger children as a group are still often excluded from decision-making processes. Oldfield and Fowler's mapping exercise (2004) found that fewer than 20 per cent of organisations that provided a service for under-fours involved them in decision-making, and only 54 per cent said that they involved children aged five to eight.

Children develop at different rates and are influenced by a range of factors specific to their individual circumstances. It is for this reason that children of all ages should be offered a variety of different means in which to participate (Wright and Haydon, 2002). McNeish (1999) suggests that:

whilst age-related characteristics are not universal, many of the projects which have succeeded in engaging and maintaining young people's participation have designed their activities to be age-appropriate as well as responsive to individual interests and capabilities.

A number of resources provide advice about the participation of younger children. Many focus on the importance of using creative and flexible communication techniques.

See Resource tool box: Participation of young children

See Case study 7, Case study 10

Marginalised groups of children and young people

Disadvantaged or 'vulnerable' children and young people often face barriers to participation for less visible reasons than age and impairment. A huge number may fall into this category: looked-after children and young people or care leavers, teenage parents, homeless young people, young offenders, refugees or asylum seekers, those from minority ethnic groups, gay and lesbian young people and young carers (Wright and Haydon, 2002).

Calder and Cope's review of the Prince's Trust (2004) found that 'hard to reach' young people valued the ability to make their own choices. However, agencies frequently sought to direct them rather than engage them.

McNeish (1999) identifies some of the factors that serve to magnify barriers to participation for these groups of young people:

- Young people who have had difficult life experiences are less likely to have the confidence and self-esteem to participate.
- If their views have not been taken into account in the past, they are less likely to be motivated to participate in the present.
- If their experiences have included mistreatment by adults, they are less likely to trust the current intentions of adults trying to engage their participation.
- Negative assumptions and stereotypes that can be applied to young people generally may be even stronger for certain groups of young people.
- Young people are likely to be put off participation if they have had previous problems communicating in groups.

Research into the impact of the Neighbourhood Support Fund and supporting the 'hardest-to-reach young people' (2004) found that organisations that succeeded in engaging with these young people did so because they relied heavily on outreach work, established a positive reputation in the local community and linked with other agencies who had contact with specific groups of young people.

Resource tool box: Participation of marginalised groups of children and young people

See Case study 3, Case study 4, Case study 5, Case study 6, Case study 12

Ensuring the safe participation

The National Youth Agency (2004) summarises the literature regarding 'safe' participation into four main areas for consideration: consent; protection; access; rewards and feedback.

Consent

All children and young people have the right to participate. However, their consent should be sought at the beginning of the participation process. It is also important to consider who else may need to give their consent – for example, a parent or a teacher (Alderson, 1995).

Whether contributing to a decision about their individual care or about the development of a service, children and young people should be provided with adequate and relevant information to be able to give their informed consent. The information should be provided in an accessible, child-friendly format and should include:

- why they have been asked to participate
- what they will have to do to participate
- what information will be shared, with whom and how, and whether it will remain anonymous/confidential.

In seeking consent, organisations should recognise that children and young people can choose to participate or not and, when given relevant information, may decide not to get involved.

There's something about recognising that children and young people will want to be involved in different things at different points in their lives and they have the right to say: 'Bugger off.'

Practitioner

The more you force young people to do things, the more scared they are ... it should be left to their own choice.

Young person

Protection

Even though I have been involved in lots of things, I still get nervous ... but it is OK because I know that I can ask people in the project for support.

Young person

Organisations should consider the potential risks in involving children and young people and how they could be reduced. Alderson (1995) identifies a number of 'risks or costs' to young people's participation in research, which can be attributed to their involvement in service development and delivery generally:

- time
- inconvenience

- embarrassment
- intrusion
- a sense of failure or coercion
- fear of admitting anxiety.

Organisations need to recognise these potential risks and costs and ensure that they provide adequate training, information, resources and support to ensure that participation is a positive experience for all children and young people involved. If a child or young person does become distressed or asks to withdraw, organisations should have support strategies in place to address this.

Access

Organisations need to consider which children and young people should be given the opportunity to become involved. This decision should be informed by who is likely to be affected by the work. For example, if young people are being asked to inform the development of a new service, which young people are likely to access the service?

Organisations should also consider whose views will be represented by the young people: are they representing the views of all young people in the community – and, if so, are they a representative group – or only their individual views (Wright and Haydon, 2002)? Organisations may need to consider how to access certain groups of young people to ensure that a representative group is involved – for instance, by working in partnership with other organisations.

Issues such as venue, transport, disability access, language, access to resources and young people's individual support needs should be considered to ensure that the work is accessible for all young people.

Rewards and feedback

Whatever the participatory activity, there has to be something in it for the young people, whether they just have a good time or there's a reward or whether they see a positive change.

Practitioner

Children and young people should be asked how they would like to receive feedback, and any feedback should be produced in a child-friendly format. For example, if young people contributed to the evaluation of a service, the findings from the evaluation report could be provided in a creative and accessible way – through, say, a summary leaflet, poster or verbal presentation. Organisations should also consider how they are going to thank and reward children and young people for their involvement. This could be through providing:

- accreditation

- a certificate
- a gift voucher or payment
- a gift (either to the individual or the group) – e.g. a trip, art materials
- a letter of thanks
- a reference to include in their Record of Achievement
- work experience in the organisation.

The type of reward will depend on the children and young people involved and the nature of their involvement.

Resource tool box: Ensuring the safe participation of children and young people

See Case study 4, Case study 5, Case study 7, Case study 18

Creating an environment

All the young people consulted in the development of this guide highlighted the importance of organisations creating a 'young person friendly' environment so that children and young people feel able to share their views and contribute to decision-making processes. Environments that are either accessible or intimidating can be created by the physical nature of an organisation, as well as by adults' attitudes towards children and young people.

Developing a culture of respect isn't about giving in to children and young people or absolving your adult responsibilities, but it's about paying them the same courtesy that you would do any other person.

Practitioner

Research suggests that the development of positive relationships between adults and children and young people is essential in enabling effective participation (NSW Commission for Children and Young People, 2004; Clark and Moss, 2001; Kirby et al, 2004). As Kirby et al state: 'Whatever participation activities are used, meaningful and successful participation happens in a supportive environment where there is trust and mutual respect between adults and young people.' A successful participation culture and structure that acknowledges and attempts to address the power imbalances between adults and young people, along with identifying the value of involving young people, contributes to the development of positive relationships.

There are, however, specific issues that adults can tackle to ensure that children and young people feel able to develop trusting relationships with them. Young people themselves identified the following:

- Treat young people as individuals.
- Respect young people and their views.
- Do not judge young people on their appearance.

- Act on what young people say.
- Make yourself available to listen to young people when they want to speak.
- Respect young people's right to confidentiality.
- Provide consistent members of staff so that young people have the opportunity to develop trusting relationships over time.
- Provide young people with enough time to voice their opinions and become involved.

Social workers should take their time with young people and not be rushed so that young people feel relaxed enough to talk to them.

Young person

Organisations should develop a policy about confidentiality with and for children and young people, staff and everyone else involved in the participation process. They all need to understand how to put the principle of confidentiality into practice. The written protocol should cover all meetings and events and include clear statements about information that can and cannot be shared outside the room. The limitations on confidentiality must also be clearly spelled out and discussed and the complexity of the issues recognised. Staff need to understand that, when properly prepared and supported, children and young people are as capable as maintaining confidentiality as everyone else.

The provision of an appropriate physical environment can also dictate whether children and young people feel able to become involved (Wright and Haydon, 2002; Thomas, 2000). As Willow (2000) states, even the way that adults arrange rooms – for example, with chairs arranged around a table – can 'alienate or silence children and young people'. The most effective way of ensuring that an environment meets their needs is to ask them what makes them feel comfortable. Issues to consider include:

- Are locations accessible for children and young people (for example, are they serviced by public transport)?
- Are buildings accessible for all children and young people (including disabled individuals)?
- Is the venue welcoming, comfortable and child-friendly (for example, are appropriate refreshments provided, and does the environment enable children and young people to relax and not feel intimidated)?
- Is the environment safe for children and young people?
- Are children and young people able to participate at times appropriate to them (for example, outside school hours or at the weekend)?

Using creative/flexible approaches

As Aspinwall and Larkins (2002) state: 'Whatever activity you choose and however much time you have, one key concern will be to keep people interested.' Creating an

effective environment for participation goes some way to ensuring that young people remain involved. However, it is essential that organisations think creatively about how to adapt the current adult-orientated decision-making processes so that they are more accessible for children and young people. Flexibility is an essential element in developing effective methods for children and young people's participation (Wright and Haydon, 2002). Adopting a range of different techniques will ensure that all children and young people feel able to become involved.

If you fail to understand them, it doesn't mean that you're not going to understand them, it just means you have to try another way. That might mean using a video, bringing a photo in or using a toy which they enjoy ... anything to stimulate their interaction.

Practitioner

The following section about the mechanisms for involving children and young people provides details of resources that may inform the development of creative approaches to participation.

Mechanisms for involving children and young people

A number of different approaches have been used to involve children and young people in both the operation and strategic development of an organisation. All methods – providing they consider the key practice points as previously discussed – have both strengths and weaknesses. Different methods are appropriate for involving children and young people in different areas of an organisation's delivery, and a number of approaches may exist within the same organisation. The following sections identify some of the methods for involving children and young people in organisational development, organisational practice and individual decision-making.

Organisational development

This refers to the participation of children and young people in the strategic development of an organisation. This may involve them influencing the establishment of new services, informing the development of organisational policies or contributing to the review of existing services. The following approaches have been used by organisations to involve children and young people in these ways.

Consultation

Lansdown (2001) defines consultation as 'a process whereby adults seek to find out about children's experiences, views and concerns in order that legislation, policies and services are better informed'. Consultation can operate at a number of levels, from small-scale project evaluations to national consultation events concerning policy development, and can utilise different methods including questionnaires, focus

groups and more creative approaches such as role play, artwork and the use of internet chat rooms and text-messaging services. The strengths or limitations of a consultation will depend on whether the appropriate methods are used when the children/young people are consulted.

The National Youth Agency (2004a) suggests that the advantages of consultation are that it is:

- targeted and focused
- time limited
- cost effective
- has immediate relevance
- achieves immediate results.

However, Lansdown (2001) highlights the fact that consultation can re-enforce the unequal power relations between adults and children, as adults often initiate, manage and control the outcome of the exercise. This can be exacerbated by children and young people not receiving any follow-up about the impact of the consultation process.

Consultations can often draw on the views of an exclusive or unrepresentative group of young people. They are also often viewed as a 'quick fix' way to involve children and young people rather than as a means of developing participation at an organisational level. For consultation to be effective, organisations need to be committed to listening to, considering and acting on the issues raised by young people during the process.

See Resource tool box: Consultation

See Case study 4, Case study 5, Case study 6, Case study 7, Case study 8, Case study 15

Strategy groups

The literature identifies four main approaches to 'strategy groups':

- **Local forum/reference group:** a group that represents the views of children and young people on a specific topic or within a particular area. It may represent a particular group of young people (e.g. those who are disabled or gay/lesbian), and can be either long term or a time-limited citizens' jury that informs discussion about a current issue.
- **Parallel structure:** a group of children and young people that runs alongside an adult-led decision-making body and provides advice or acts as a sounding board.

- **Committee places:** a reserved number of seats for children and young people on an adult-led committee – for example, the organisation’s management committee or trustee group.
- **Advisory group:** a group of children or young people who advise and inform the development of a specific piece of work, either over a time-limited period (for example, during the development phase) or throughout the lifetime of an initiative (for example, in the form of a steering group).

The development of structures such as these provide clear channels of communication between children and young people and the adult decision-makers within an organisation. They increase the visibility of young people within an organisation, especially within management teams who may not otherwise have any contact with young people. They also enable children and young people to gain an increased knowledge about how an organisation works, as well as enabling them to have a sense of ownership/influence (National Youth Agency, 2004).

Again, the advantage of this approach depends on the way in which it is implemented and whether or not the key practice points are considered. Although there are creative ways of involving young people in strategic decision-making structures (for example, by young people contributing to committee meetings using videoconferencing facilities), they often reflect formalised adult structures that immediately exclude many children and young people from participating. Irregular meetings can also lead to a lack of momentum, especially if the outcomes from young people’s contributions are not being fed back to the group.

Organisations need to consider how much influence young people have within these structures, and ensure that clear two-way lines of communication are established between young people’s groups and adult-led management structures (National Youth Agency, 2004; Wright and Haydon, 2002).

See Resource tool box: Involving children and young people in meetings/forums/boards

See Case study 2, Case study 4, Case study 8, Case study 9, Case study 11, Case study 14, Case study 15

Organisational practice

This refers to the different approaches that have been used to involve children and young people in an organisation’s operation. This may involve children and young people delivering or contributing to specific aspects of services.

Staff training

A number of organisations now involve children and young people in delivering or informing the training of internal and external staff and volunteers. This may include the delivery of workshops at conferences, contributions to staff induction programmes or participation in formalised training courses for specific groups such as social workers, foster carers and agencies working with children and young people (for example, the police or health services).

See Case study 1, Case study 2, Case study 9

Staff recruitment

I was involved in an interview with a manager from the project and we made some questions ... you get a sense of achievement, especially if you picked the person and they are doing a good job!

Young person

An increasing number of organisations now involve children and young people in the recruitment of staff including writing of job descriptions, shortlisting candidates, developing interview questions and selecting the final individual for the post. Children and young people's involvement in the recruitment process can depend on those taking part, the post and the level at which young people are able to influence the final decision-making process (Children's Rights Officers and Advocates/Local Government Association, 1998).

Organisations have used a variety of methods to involve children and young people in the final selection process, including:

- young people sitting alongside adults on the interview panel
- a parallel young persons' interview panel
- specific tasks where young people and candidates involved in particular activities such as role-play scenarios.

See Resource tool box: Involving children and young people in recruitment

See Case study 1, Case study 2, Case study 3, Case study 5, Case study 9, Case study 11, Case study 13, Case study 15, Case study 16 Case study 17

Promotional activities

You should never have any sort of event that is about participation, in my view, without having children and young people there.

Practitioner

To ensure that service information is accessible to service users, organisations have involved children and young people in designing and developing leaflets, posters, logos, service names and presentations to promote their services and provide young person-friendly information.

See Resource tool box: Involving young people in promotional activities

See *Case study 3, Case study 6, Case study 9, Case study 10, Case study 11, Case study 14, Case study 15*

Research

As well as contributing to the evaluation of services via consultation, some organisations have provided opportunities for young people to participate in specific pieces of research (Alderson, 1995). The extent to which they are involved in the research process can range from a role on an adult-led advisory group to full responsibility for the research question, design and delivery (McNeish, 1999).

See Resource tool box: Involving children and young people in research

See Case study 16

Peer-led programmes

Children and young people can also participate by delivering a service to other children and young people. This approach may involve the establishment of specific posts within an organisation reserved for young people or ex-service users (for example, as participation workers), the development of services solely delivered by young people (for instance, peer mediation) or specific roles for young people within the organisation (for example, mentoring/befriending new service users).

See Resource tool box: Involving children and young people in peer-led programmes

See Case study 4, Case study 8, Case study 13, Case study 16, Case study 17, Case study 18

The advantage of involving children and young people in the operation of services is that it has a direct impact on how they are delivered. Approaches such as these also enable children and young people to have a more equal working relationship with adults, and provide them with transferable vocational skills as well as self-confidence. Children and young people may also receive payments for participating in organisational practice (National Youth Agency, 2004).

At the same time, to realise these benefits organisations need to consider the support, training and resource implications of effective participation – staff

recruitment, for example, may become a much longer process when children and young people are involved.

If you are going to involve young people, particularly young people with communication difficulties or complex learning disabilities, then you need time, two or three months. There is a lot to organise.

Practitioner referring to the involvement of disabled young people in a conference workshop

It is also recognised that the contributions of children and young people can often be credited to adults, and there is a risk of adults patronising children and young people involved in delivering services if effective cultures and practices have not been established (National Youth Agency, 2004). The short-term nature of children and young people's involvement – for example, in recruitment – and the fact that it only offers an opportunity to a select group of children and young people should also be considered (Wright and Haydon, 2002).

Individual decision-making

As well as ensuring that children and young people have opportunities to become involved in strategic development and service delivery, organisations should consider how they can participate in decision-making on an individual level. A number of guides and resource packs have been produced about the involvement of young people in specific elements of individual decision-making – for example, complaints procedures, looked-after children reviews, family group conferences, and child protection case conferences. Kirby et al (2003) summarise the types of decisions that, within organisations, children and young people might participate in with support:

- consenting to participate
- choosing which play and leisure activities they want to do
- deciding own learning, health treatment and care support
- child protection and family law proceedings.

By implementing the key practice points as discussed previously, an organisation's practice should enable children and young people to make decisions about their experience of a service on a day-to-day basis. An organisation may also adopt specific methods to ensure that opportunities are available for young people to share their views – for example, by developing a suggestions box or child-friendly complaints procedure or by recruiting advocates for children and young people.

See Resource tool box: Involving children and young people in individual decision-making

Competencies required

To implement and enable the involvement of children and young people in collective and individual decision-making processes, both adults and young people should be supported to develop key competencies. The resource tool boxes throughout this guide may provide a starting point from which organisations can develop this knowledge. However, the following table (informed by both practitioners and young people) summarises the key competencies that adults and children and young people may require to ensure effective participation.

Competencies required by adults	Competencies required by children and young people
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What participation means and why is it important • Potential impact of participation (on children and young people and the organisation) • Opportunity to explore attitudes towards participation and working in partnership with children and young people • Knowledge about different methods that can be used to involve children and young people • Communication techniques that enable the involvement of all children and young people • Responsiveness • Sensitivity to and awareness of the individual needs of children and young people • Opportunity to develop imaginative and creative techniques • Knowledge about how to work with children and young people safely and establish appropriate boundaries for their involvement. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What participation means and why is it important • Potential impact of participation (on children and young people and the organisation) • Opportunity to explore attitudes to participation and working in partnership with adults • Knowledge about different methods that can be used to involve children and young people • Opportunity to explore how they would like to be able to participate and what they would like to see changed • Team-building activities that enable the development of such skills as listening, being responsive to others, taking responsibility for specific roles, debating, communicating. • Opportunity to develop confidence in expressing their own views • Skills in presenting own views and views of other children and young people • Skills and experience in relation to specific participation activities.

Wright and Haydon, 2002

The nature and extent of training delivered to adults and young people can depend on a number of factors. As discussed in Culture in this guide, all staff and children and young people within an organisation should receive a general introduction to participation to ensure that a shared understanding and commitment to

participation is established. (This may be delivered, through induction programmes or team meetings, for example.)

If you don't do it for everyone, then you get into: 'Oh, that's participation, that's for someone else.'

Practitioner

A certain level of understanding needs to be fostered amongst all staff to promote a culture of participation.

Practitioner

Practitioners and children and young people should be given the opportunity to identify their specific learning and development needs in relation to participation. An organisation may also wish to consider involving children and young people in delivering training to practitioners – for example, about their experience of being involved or how adults can effectively communicate and listen to children and young people.

Total respect (Children's Rights Officers and Advocates/Department of Health, 2000) – which relates to the involvement of children and young people in care – provides an example of a training package that is specifically designed to be delivered by children and young people. An accompanying toolkit for practitioners supporting young trainers has been produced called Training the trainers for 'Total respect' (2004).

Case studies related to provision of training for adults

See Case study 2, Case study 4, Case study 5, Case study 6, Case study 7, Case study 11

Case studies related to provision of training for young people

See Case study 2, Case study 10, Case study 12, Case study 14, Case study 16, Case study 18

Review

What review means

This guide employs the term 'review' to refer to the process of monitoring and evaluating the participation of children and young people. Patton (1997, cited in Kirby and Bryson, 2002) provides a useful definition of this process: 'Evaluation is the systematic collection of information about activities, characteristics and outcomes of programmes to make judgements about the programme, improve programme effectiveness and/or inform decisions about future programming.'

Why the review process is important

As Cutler (2003) suggests, 'any system of standards must require evidence to demonstrate that the standard has been reached.' Without reviewing participation within an organisation, there is no recorded evidence that children and young people have been actively involved, contributed to change or stimulated improvement within services.

Unfortunately there is evidence to suggest that many organisations fail to review the participation of children and young people. Oldfield and Fowler's mapping of children and young people's participation in England (2004) found that there was limited use of 'monitoring and formal evaluation procedures' in both the voluntary and the statutory sectors. Franklin and Sloper's research into the participation of disabled children and young people in social service departments (2004) found that more than half of the respondents could not indicate change resulting from the involvement of children and young people. Where change had occurred, the majority of respondents referred to a change in the activities that they provided.

Kirby et al (2003) found that there were four common reasons why organisations often failed to evidence outcomes resulting from children and young people's participation:

- 1 Organisations believe that they are too early on in the process of participation to be able to evidence change.
- 2 Organisations provide descriptive accounts of what they have done to involve children and young people, rather than what has changed as a result of their involvement.
- 3 Organisations find it difficult to evidence possible outcomes of participation – such as young people's increased self-esteem.
- 4 Organisations find it difficult to attribute change specifically to the involvement of children and young people as there may have been other factors that contributed to the outcomes.

As Kirby et al suggest in their second point, where organisations have reviewed the participation of children and young people, the focus has tended to be on monitoring the outputs rather than the outcomes. This is often due to the fact that an increased number of funders and partner agencies require organisations to evidence that they have involved children and young people, rather than monitor the quality or impact of this engagement. Numerous mapping exercises have been undertaken to demonstrate how children and young people have been involved, but they provide very little evidence about the outcomes of this involvement.

There are a number of reasons why outcome focused evaluation is important when reviewing participation. First, there is a growing emphasis on the importance of evidence-based practice. As Kirby and Bryson (2002) state, 'it is recognised as good practice to review and reflect on interventions, even when they appear to be working, to ensure we develop our work further.' The process of review, therefore, provides the opportunity for organisations to determine what has been effective in terms of effecting change within their service and what could be developed to ensure children and young people have more influence in the future.

Robson et al's research about user involvement in voluntary organisations (2003) found that change was more likely to occur in those services that continually monitored their policy and practice relating to participation. Regular review processes also enable organisations to see the benefits of children and young people's involvement – and, as a result, maintain participation high on their agenda.

The most important reason for any organisation to review participation is to be able to evidence improved outcomes for the children and young people who access their services. As Wade (2001) suggests: 'The participation of children and young people in the issues that affect them is only as good as the changes to their benefit which result.' If an organisation adheres to this principle, it has an ethical obligation to review participation to ensure that children and young people's involvement is effecting change and/or improvement.

First and foremost, you need to identify what the young people thought about it, what difference has it made to the young people who have been involved and what difference has it made to the service and their expectations of the service.

Practitioner

Developing review systems

A number of issues need to be considered when reviewing the participation of children and young people within an organisation:

Identifying outcomes

If we don't know what we are trying to do, it is difficult to measure it.

Practitioner

The importance of establishing clear outcomes for participation is discussed in Culture<link to file 03b>. An organisation that has developed a culture of participation, with a clear understanding about why children and young people should be involved and the possible impacts of their involvement, can then evaluate whether participation has achieved its proposed outcomes. Kirby and Bryson (2002) propose that 'evaluation can only be as good as the clarity of the intended outcomes and processes employed by programmes.'

Organisations often create barriers to effective review processes, by either failing to establish proposed outcomes from the start or by defining outcomes that are unrealistic or impossible to measure. The process of developing outcomes should include what an organisation hopes to see change for its service, its service users (i.e. children and young people) and wider key stakeholders (e.g. the local community) as a result of involving children and young people. These outcomes (Wright and Haydon, 2002) need to be:

- **realistic:** the development of effective participation is time consuming and organisations should acknowledge how much real change is possible within a certain time frame.
- **measurable:** outcomes should identify what will change/improve as a result of participation and should be measurable to evidence the change.
- **specific:** outcomes should provide clear proposals for change (which both adults and young people can understand) so that it is clear where evidence needs to be recorded and collected.

The involvement of children and young people in defining outcomes for participation is crucial in enabling adults and young people to have shared influence over the development, delivery and review of services.

Involving children and young people

Young people's involvement in the process of reviewing participation is important in ascertaining what has changed from their point of view and informing them about change that has been effected. By involving them in the review process, an organisation is able to demonstrate the importance of participation in all elements of its service development and delivery. Cutler (2003) states that the involvement of children and young people in review processes 'brings local young people into greater contact with an organisation, builds relationships and gives an authenticity to the claims of an organisation to involve young people'.

While acknowledging these principles, Kirby and Bryson (2002) suggest that there are four questions that organisations should ask themselves when involving children and young people in the review process:

- 1 In what ways do young people want to get involved in carrying out research/evaluations?
- 2 What capacity and skills do young people have to participate effectively in carrying out research/evaluations?
- 3 How can young people's participation be balanced with the demands for rigorous research criteria?
- 4 In what ways do power issues between young people and adults, and between young peers, impact on research/evaluations?

Resourcing review systems

The reviewing of participation can be undertaken internally by organisations, by children and young people or by external researchers. In all three cases, resource implications need to be considered and accounted for. Staff and young people will require knowledge, skills, tools, support and time to undertake the review process effectively. The commissioning of an external researcher will almost certainly require a budget. The cost of disseminating review findings (in accessible formats for children, young people and adults) must also be considered. Kirby and Bryson (2002) suggest a number of ways in which findings could be disseminated:

- workshops and dissemination events for practitioners and managers
- summary leaflets, posters, video or audio recordings for feedback to young people
- papers, articles and seminars for professional audiences
- media work with communities to promote the importance and effectiveness of children and young people's participation.

Tools and guides relating to the review of participation focus on two distinct areas:

- 1 **evidencing the process of participation**
- 2 **reviewing the outcomes of participation.**

As previously discussed, the majority of organisations review participation by identifying what they are currently doing to involve children and young people. This is a valuable exercise as it enables organisations to reflect on their current practice, identify any gaps or areas for improvement and thus develop the participation of children and young people further.

However, without focusing on what has changed as a result of this practice – the outcomes of participation – it is difficult for organisations to assess whether or not children and young people's participation has led to improvements or change. Therefore, they need to consider how they will evidence the process of participation and whether or not this process has achieved positive outcomes for children, young people and the organisation.

Evidencing the process

Many tools that have been developed to map participation practice use Shier's model of participation (2001) as their foundation. Like Shier, they suggest that organisations can be at different stages of involving children and young people, at different times and within different areas of their work. They propose that the aim of developing participatory practice is not to reach an advanced level, but rather to consider and develop structures and processes that promote and sustain participation throughout the organisation (Wright and Haydon, 2002). As White (2001) states: 'Genuine and meaningful participation can occur lower down the participation hierarchy – sometimes it is the only work that is possible.'

One of the most commonly used models is Hear by right (Wade et al, 2001), which provides standards for organisations to map and improve practice and policy within seven distinct areas.

Wright and Haydon (2002) have used a similar model that prompts organisations to evidence participatory practice in four areas of service development and delivery:

- establishing a commitment to participation
- planning and developing participation
- ways of working
- skills, knowledge and experience required by young people and practitioners.

In each area, organisations are invited to evidence whether they are at an emerging, established or advanced level of participation.

Whichever review model is used, organisations need to consider their current involvement of children and young people in terms of their culture, structure, practice and review systems. By considering all four areas, an organisation can develop children and young people's participation so that it is capable of effecting change and improvement.

See Resource tool box: Evidencing the process of participation

Reviewing the outcomes

There are significantly fewer tools to support organisations in reviewing the outcomes of participation. Wade (2003) suggests that there are two main questions that organisations need to ask themselves to evidence change as a result of children and young people's involvement:

- Is there evidence that children and young people have been actively listened to?
- Is there evidence of change as a result of listening to children and young people?

Wade's 'What has changed?' template (2004) accompanies the Hear by right standards and provides a tool for organisations to measure change and/or improvement effected by children and young people's involvement.

Issues to consider when reviewing the outcomes of participation, identified by practitioners

- Reviews should consider the reasons for change/improvement. Change might happen for a variety of reasons and not specifically because children and young people have been involved.
'I can't honestly say that we've changed purely because children and young people have told us that's what they wanted, I would say there is a hidden agenda: the fact that it's cheaper.'
- Reviews should recognise that it is as important to identify the small changes as well as the larger ones.
'[Reviewing our outcomes] has highlighted a lot of really quite small and subtle changes in practice, but really important ones.'
- Reviews should include an evaluation of the current cultural climate and organisational practice so that, over time, an organisation can evidence changes that occur as the process of developing participation continues.
'You need to know what you have got to start with – some sort of measurement of organisational culture, and then introduce participation and carry on measuring and hope that things change.'
- Review frameworks should be flexible enough to enable innovative and creative methods of evaluation.
'They don't talk about their pledge [proposed outcomes], they play and they make their pledge in a creative way and then they review their pledge and say what they've done with young people. That's been a very, very useful way of highlighting some really good changes in practice.'

See Resource tool box: Reviewing the outcomes of participation

See Case study 2, Case study 3, Case study 5, Case study 8, Case study 11

Comparison of findings

This section examines the similarities and differences in the findings of the research review, practice survey and consultations with social care staff and with children and young people. It also reflects on the subsequent implications for participation practice.

- The research review found a plethora of information on the participation of children and young people. This included existing participation guidance and large-scale practice surveys looking at the extent and nature of participation practice across organisations working with children and young people. This influenced how we approached the practice survey. Rather than repeat recent practice surveys, we decided to build on this work and 'follow up' some of the services/organisations 'one year on' to see to what extent participation practice had been developed.
- Policy, practice and research seem to be at different stages. There is a danger that participation will become the latest 'buzzword' in social care policy and practice, such that it becomes simply a 'tick box' exercise or a requirement before organisations can properly embed participation within their culture, structure, practice and review. There is evidence of this from the research review, practice survey and consultations (see below).
- When reviewing the literature in this area, we discovered a significant amount of 'grey' literature. This was written primarily by practitioners or by researchers who worked for, or had been commissioned by, social care organisations working with children and young people. As a result, within the participation field, there are many overlaps between the messages from research and those from practice. This can mean, at times, a lack of clarity in ascertaining what is research, what is consultation and what is practice.
- A clear gap identified through the research review, practice survey and consultations was the review of the participation work of children and young people. The practice survey and consultations suggested that organisations are reviewing the 'process' of participation (i.e. what they are doing) and the 'outcomes' for children and young people directly involved in participation practice (e.g. improved confidence). However, there was less evidence of organisations reviewing the 'outcomes' of participation (i.e. what changed or improved). Furthermore, among the literature, there is a lack of guidance, tools and knowledge about how services and organisations can review the outcomes of participation.
- Through the practice survey, we discovered that some services were struggling with how to set clear aims and objectives for participation work. As a result, they were finding it a challenge to define and measure the outcomes of participation. Confusion surrounded the nature of outcomes for participation work: is it changes or improvements in social care practice? Or the direct impact on the children and young people involved? Or how the participation element has impacted on the change or improvement? That is, would the same outcomes have been reached without children and young people's participation? There

appears to be a limited amount of guidance to support services and organisations in setting outcomes for participation.

- Both the research review and the consultation process identified the need for a whole-systems approach to participation. However, the majority of guidance relates to participation practice. During the consultations, practitioners admitted that, while they had developed their participation practice, their organisations still had some way to go in terms of developing a culture and structure that could sustain participation. Particular issues were: no shared definition or understanding of participation, participation linked to one-off activities, and a lack of long-term funding for participation work. This is reflected in the case studies, the majority of which could evidence change on a small scale but not at an organisational level.
- Although there are a growing number of resources on involving specific groups of children and young people, the practice survey and consultations showed that specific groups such as younger children and disabled children and young people are still under-represented in participation practice. In the case studies, staff described their participation practice as inclusive. However, when asked to describe the profile of the children and young people involved, most examples were of white, able-bodied young adults.
- Research points to the need for participation to be properly resourced in terms of time, money and staff. The 'reality' from the practice survey and consultations is that the participation of children and young people is often carried out on a shoestring. This suggests that, while the research points to the need for a culture and structure of participation to effect change or improvements to social care services, this is not always happening in practice.
- Much of the literature focuses on the 'how' and 'what' of participation and less on the 'why'. The research, practice and consultation materials seem to suggest that participation is 'inherently a good thing'. However, with little evidence from practice of clear purpose or outcomes – how do we know? There are few messages from research or practice on the potential negative impact of participation or of possible detrimental outcomes for children and young people who participate.
- An issue highlighted across the research review, practice survey and consultations is the power imbalance between adults and children and young people or between social care staff and users of social care services. Some of the practice guidance looks at ways to overcome this. A related issue, which is only touched on in the research but which was highlighted in the practice survey and consultations, is the power imbalance between social care practitioners and senior managers/decision-makers within social care organisations. This is evident in the extensive participation practice (projects, initiatives, one-off events, etc) that takes place in organisations where there is not an established culture or structure for participation.
- The key challenge for practitioners is how to create a successful 'bottom up' approach to embed participation within the organisations in which they work.

Case studies

1. Care Action Team, Hampshire Social Services
2. Fernhill Youth Project
3. Health Through Action Project – Peer Support Groups, Barnardo's
4. Lambeth Youth Council, Lambeth Council
5. Making Inclusion a Reality, Barnardo's
6. Wider Horizons, Scottish Throughcare and After Care Forum
7. Triangle
8. Voice and Influence of Young People Team, Cornwall Youth Service
9. Reference Group, Cheshire and Warrington Connexions
10. Freaky Fabulous Funky Fun Centre, Barnardo's Catalyst Service
11. Investing in Children, Durham and Darlington County Council
12. Loughborough Youth Affairs, Youth Service
13. Rights and Participation Project (RAPP)
14. Dumfries and Galloway Youth Strategy Executive Group
15. Speakout Initiative, Staffordshire Youth Service
16. Voices Project, Cumbria Youth Alliance
17. Wakefield Children's Grants, Wakefield Children's Fund and Barnardo's
18. Youthcomm, Worcestershire Youth Service

1. Care Action Team, Hampshire Social Services

Service provided by organisation

The Care Action Team (CAT), established in 1999, is a group of young people who are, or have been, in care. They work alongside members and officers of Hampshire County Council to improve the services offered to children and young people in and leaving care.

Characteristics of children/young people involved

Seven care-experienced core members aged 15-21: 5 females and 2 males. Majority of users are white.

How participation has been developed

CAT was established following concerns raised by children and young people about the care system within Hampshire. The project is young person-led and facilitated by two previous members who are now employed by the council. The team holds a general meeting once a month and meet outside this to focus on specific pieces of work such as consultations, inspections and training provision. There are six bursary

posts for young people who are more heavily involved in the project's work. The team also visit residential homes to ensure that the views of the most vulnerable young people are gathered.

As 'experts' in the care system, we train and give presentations to professionals who work with young people; advise and challenge managers on decisions relating to the services that affect young people; promote the importance of 'true' consultation with young people; and work to change society's stereotype of young people in care.

CAT member

Hampshire County Council has demonstrated a commitment towards participation through the funding of a participation officer. The work of the Care Action Team is led by young people themselves; they have control over the agenda and activities. The participation workers offer support and facilitation.

Changes or improvements as a result of children and young people's participation

- The team itself has become more structured and supported.
- The 'CAT Mark', a charter mark for services working with children and young people, was developed. It has been adopted by a number of agencies including Connexions and has led to the development of close relationships with government.
- The sleepover policy was changed, making it easier for young people to stay overnight with friends.
- The Children's Homes Education Policy was developed, which has improved support for young people in care.
- Trained educational psychologists at Southampton University and designated tutors at further education colleges.
- Young people are now involved in the appointment of all staff in leaving-care teams.
- Young people are now involved in the inspection of children's homes.
- Young people themselves have an increased sense of worth and awareness that they are not alone in their experiences.

Evidence of outcomes from participation

The project has produced the following documentation to evidence the development of participation:

- job descriptions that include reference to the importance of participation
- information on the CAT Mark, changes to policies and inspection reports.

Contact details

Contact person and role: Mark Houston or Emily Joslin (co-chair of the CAT)
Address: Care Action Team, c/o Hampshire County Council Social Services, Trafalgar House, The Castle, Winchester SO23 8UQ
Tel: 01962 845 700
Email: information@careactionteam.org
Website: www.careactionteam.org

2. Fernhill Youth Project

Service provided by organisation

Young person-led community project established in 2000, with a focus on peer education. It includes a cyber café providing a drop-in facility, social activities, training and community development activities.

Characteristics of children/young people involved

123 children and young people aged 11-25 from the local community. Even gender mix. Majority of users are white.

How participation has been developed

The project was developed in an area of high deprivation following consultations with local children and young people. Young people are involved in every aspect of the project, at all levels: planning, delivery and evaluation. They help recruit and interview staff, deliver training, facilitate consultations, plan activity schedules and have control over the project budget. A variety of training, identified by young people, is delivered to them, including citizenship, children's rights, health and safety, child protection, literacy, emotional literacy and conflict management.

The staff within the project are employed to facilitate the young people's involvement in the project. While much of their training is provided by the young people at the project, they have also received specialist external training by Dynamix and Funky Dragon. Participation is emphasised to staff when they are inducted, in their training and in their job descriptions. A Memorandum of Association serves as a charter for participation. The impact of the project on young people, the community and partner agencies has been comprehensively evaluated by Save the Children.

Changes or improvements as a result of children and young people's participation

- Project members sit on the Community First Board and the Junior Health Board where they feed into agendas. The project has also been involved in the local Crime Prevention Panel.

- The project worked with sexual health clinics to increase the availability of condoms and sex education. It has now developed its own materials and visits local schools to provide sex education.
- Young people have enhanced the appearance of the project venue by encouraging local DIY stores to donate materials.
- Evaluations have found that involvement has increased young peoples' confidence, raised their aspirations and developed a wide variety of organisational skills.

Evidence of outcomes from participation

The project has produced the following documentation to evidence the development of participation:

- evaluation report about process of developing participation and its impacts
- Memorandum of Association highlighting project objectives
- job descriptions that include reference to the importance of participation.

Contact details

Contact person and role: Les Davis (project manager)

Address: 8 The Shops, Fernhill Estate, Glenboi, Mountain Ash, RCT, CF45 3EE

Tel: 01443 476 487

Email: fernhillyouthproject@btconnect.com

3. Health Through Action Project – Peer Support Groups, Barnardo's

Service provided by organisation

The Health Through Action Project was established in 1995 to provide a planning, support and bereavement service to children and young people affected by HIV and their carers. The peer support groups are young person-led.

Characteristics of children/young people involved

There are two peer support groups: one for children aged 10-15, and one for young people aged 16-18. All members are either infected or affected by HIV. There are approximately 13 group members. More than half of them are male, and there is a broad mix of minority ethnic groups.

How participation has been developed

The peer support groups are led by young people. Evaluation forms are used at the end of each group session to inform activities for future ones. The support groups

have been encouraged to identify issues to campaign on and have been successful in raising awareness of HIV and highlighting related issues.

Although participation is not identified in the project's mission statement, job descriptions or training, staff feel that it is integral to their work and there is a dedicated budget for the support groups. The importance of feedback and rewarding children and young people for their involvement is emphasised to all external agencies. The project recently won a Barnardo's 'Investors in Young People' award: a cash prize that the young people chose how to spend.

The groups are run both from a child-friendly room within the project and from school halls and community centres, to make them as accessible as possible for the groups. The children and young people involved in the groups have not received any training, but comment that they receive sufficient support from project workers.

Changes or improvements as a result of children and young people's participation

- The group have raised awareness of HIV and Aids through the production of a video for conferences, schools and practitioners, leaflets and postcards sent to family planning clinics and a public display for World Aids Day.
- The group have been instrumental in campaigning for the forthcoming establishment of a support group for young carers.
- The group have been involved in writing job descriptions and recruiting staff.
- An increased understanding of HIV 'at their own pace' has allowed the support group members to grow in confidence and develop social relationships.

Evidence of outcomes from participation

The project has produced the following documentation to evidence the development of participation:

- Service Business Plan 2004-05, outlining project aims
- activity/group planning sheet
- group publicity
- 'evaluation of group activities' form (staff and child).

Contact details

Contact person and role: Michelle Ward (family support and befriending service project worker)

Address: The Progress Centre, Charlton Place, Ardwick Green, Manchester M12 6HS

Tel: 0161 273 2901

Email: michelle.ward@barnardos.org.uk

4. Lambeth Youth Council, Lambeth Council

Service provided by organisation

Lambeth Youth Council was established in 2002 to involve young people in improving local services and policy, and to encourage them to become community leaders.

Characteristics of children/young people involved

One hundred black and minority ethnic young people aged 11-24 are involved in the youth council. It is open to all young people with an interest in community development. There is an equal gender mix.

How participation has been developed

The youth council was established following the continued involvement of a group of young people in local authority events. More members were recruited via outreach work and word of mouth. Although the youth council meets weekly to discuss issues, their work is more project-focused. They currently have three main areas of work: the Peer Inspection project, the Teenage Pregnancy Peer Education project and the Stop and Search project. The young people involved in these projects receive a variety of relevant external training and receive payment and accreditation (either through the Youth Achievement Award or Millennium Award) for their work.

Video consultations and questionnaires are also carried out with a wide range of young people within Lambeth. Eight young people have recently been elected as youth executive members whose role is to shadow councillors and highlight issues raised within the youth council meetings.

Lambeth Council have demonstrated a commitment to participation through their provision of funding and work with the youth council. The latter feels that it has considerable access to all council services and councillors. The youth council budget includes money for staffing, resources, publicity and payments for the young people. There are three full-time project workers and an administrator to facilitate the youth council's work. Participation is emphasised in Lambeth Council's Youth and Play Service Strategy and in youth service staff training. Youth council staff receive internal training (involving youth council members), as well as external training about participation.

The youth council's work is highly visible within the community: local newspapers as well as youth council information and publicity highlight the positive work undertaken by the young people. All work undertaken is evaluated by participants.

Changes or improvements as a result of children and young people's participation

- a direct improvement in services for young people in Lambeth (e.g. better sex education in schools, improved training for police officers, improved youth projects)
- improving awareness of the benefits of involving children and young people within the council
'Previously certain councillors were wary of involving children and young people. Now they want to, and appreciate that the young people are not there just to complain but to work together to find positive solutions' (Youth council development worker)
- peer inspection is now built into the quality assessment framework of the Youth and Play Service
- increased self-confidence, skill development and work experience for young people
'More than words can describe, the personal development has been first class' (Young person)
- a greater willingness by a variety of decision-making bodies (e.g. the local strategic partnership, area committees) to engage with and involve young people.

Evidence of outcomes from participation

The project has produced the following documentation to evidence the development of participation:

- a guide to peer inspection including mission statement
- North Lambeth Town Centre Peer Inspection Report
- media coverage.

Contact details

Contact person and role: Andy Hamflett (youth council development worker)

Address: Room 113, Lambeth Town Hall, Brixton Hill, London SW2 1RW

Tel: 020 7926 2490

Email: ahamflett@lambeth.gov.uk

5. Making Inclusion a Reality (MIAR), Barnardo's

Service provided by organisation

MIAR was established in 2003 to support excluded young people in utilising social and leisure opportunities.

Characteristics of children/young people involved

Sixteen young people aged 5-13 who are excluded from other services due to disabilities, lack of confidence, poverty or rural isolation. There is an equal gender mix and most of the users are white.

How participation has been developed

Children and young people have been involved in the development of the project from its inception. They chose the group name, devised the ground rules, selected the operating times and come up with the activities the group undertakes.

All staff within the project are responsible for promoting participation. This is emphasised in general staff training, job descriptions, and the projects admissions policy, copies of which are given to children and parents. Staff have also received 'total communication' training to facilitate the involvement of children and young people with communication difficulties.

Children and young people have been involved in consultations and staff recruitment; for the latter, they received a certificate and gift vouchers. The group's aims and activities are highlighted in MIAR News, a regular users' newsletter, and local newspapers and radio stations also publicise their work. Children and young people are able to raise issues through weekly 'circle time', questionnaires and meetings.

The project has recently reviewed its work through compiling a report and a drama presentation for parents and professionals. Families have been actively engaged in the project through regular meetings and event days.

Changes or improvements as a result of children and young people's participation

- input into local Play Association's policy on play
- involvement in Somerset Children's Fund staff interviews
- joint working to improve service provision, as a result of trips undertaken to local leisure services
- developing social networks of users' families
- providing children with 'nowhere else to go' with the self-confidence to utilise new services.

Evidence of outcomes from participation

The project has produced the following documentation to evidence the development of participation:

- job descriptions that include reference to the importance of participation
- event evaluation and user comment forms
- group aims and admissions policy
- MIAR News newsletter
- six-month review by parents
- evidence and reports on participation.

Contact details

Contact person and role: Tracey Hallett (project worker)

Address: Wellbridge House, North Street, Crewkerne TA18 7AX

Tel: 07801 285 861

Email: tracey.hallett@barnardos.org.uk

6. Wider Horizons, Scottish Throughcare and After Care Forum

Service provided by organisation

The Wider Horizons Young Persons Group, established in 2002, is a participation project of the Scottish Throughcare and After Care Forum. The Debate Project, a young person-led conference-planning group, is a part of the Wider Horizons group that enables young people to raise leaving-care issues with decision-makers.

Characteristics of children/young people involved

10-15 care-experienced core members, aged 16-25. There is an even gender mix and the majority of users are white.

How participation has been developed

The organisation has a full-time young person's development worker with responsibility for developing participation. The project's main aim is to raise awareness about issues affecting young people in and leaving care. Participation is emphasised within the organisation's mission statement and aims, as well as in staff inductions, training and job descriptions. There is a dedicated budget for involving young people both in the organisation and in the Debate Project. This budget includes staffing costs, travel expenses, food and other resources.

The core group of young people involved in the project meet six to eight times a year and are involved in:

- managing the Wider Horizons project
- consultations about care
- organising conferences

- development of the organisation's website.

Young people receive training on a variety of topics including participation.

Changes or improvements as a result of children and young people's participation

- As a result of feedback from children and young people, the organisation's annual conference had increased opportunities for discussions and debates, leading to an increase of children and young people attending the conference from 10 to 50.
- Awareness of the needs of care-experienced young people has been raised within the local authority.
- There are increased opportunities for looked-after young people and care leavers to raise issues and present their views to local authority services.

Evidence of outcomes from participation

The project has produced the following documentation to evidence the development of participation:

- a job description for the development worker that includes references to the importance of participation
- newsletter outlining young people's activities.

Contact details

Contact person and role: Janet Sanders (young person's development worker)

Address: 2nd floor, 37 Otago Street, Glasgow G12 8JJ.

Tel: 0141 341 0144

Email: janet@scottishthroughcare.org.uk

Website: www.scottishthroughcare.org.uk

7. Triangle

Service provided by organisation

Triangle is a specialist childhood disability organisation, established in 1997, providing training and consultancy to individuals and organisations throughout the UK, and outreach support to children and young people in the south of England. All Triangle's work is with and on behalf of disabled children, and consultation with children and young people is built in both internally, through consultation groups to

inform their work, and externally, through specific consultation work for other organisations.

Characteristics of children/young people involved

There are three internal consultation groups divided roughly by age but with some flexibility: one for children up to age 10, one for children aged 9-15, and one for young people aged 15-25. There are approximately 40 regular members, with an even gender mix, and a third of the children are from ethnic minorities. All the children and young people in the two older groups are disabled; the younger group is inclusive (about half the group have particular needs).

The majority (80 per cent) of Triangle's consultation work comprises external work engaging children and young people outside these groups. Through this, Triangle has consulted with more than 1,200 disabled children and young people across the UK.

How participation has been developed

Triangle involves children and young people in a range of decisions – from how the groups are run and what services the organisation should develop to staff recruitment. All work undertaken for external organisations is done with the commitment of the commissioners to take action on those issues raised through the work.

Younger children are rewarded with vouchers, while older young people are paid either hourly or per session, depending on their involvement and the activity. A participation budget incorporates travel expenses, support costs, venues, resources and staff time. The two older consultation groups help manage their own budgets.

The organisation has a fully accessible room, adapted to support children and young people with a variety of needs. Staff within the project are able to communicate with children using a wide variety of methods to ensure everyone's opinion is valued.

In addition to the consultation groups, the organisation facilitates consultation with children and young people for external agencies on a range of issues and services. These consultations are preceded by contact with the children and their parents to ensure that both understand what the work involves and the importance of participation.

All staff within the project are responsible for involving children and young people. This is emphasised in job descriptions, training and the company's mission statement. An internal review was completed this year.

Changes or improvements as a result of children and young people's participation

- A raised awareness – both internally and externally – of disabled children's rights to be involved.
'You can see this through the way in which Triangle has grown as an organisation.' (Young person)
- Strong influence by young people on decisions about work – whether to accept or decline requests for work, how to focus funding bids.
- Impact on national policy – e.g. through presentations at the House of Commons and at the Audit Commission.
- Change in specific practices in services, including bedtimes policy, staff practice, security within residential homes, playtime support, homework policy, arrangements for outings in schools, consent practice and staff allocation in hospitals.
- Supported development of consultative groups in other areas.
- Sign language, symbol communication and other methods learned by several of the young people.
- 'The main thing was the opportunity to gain employment, which is especially difficult for disabled people.' (Young person)

Evidence of outcomes from participation

The project has produced the following documentation to evidence the development of participation:

- job descriptions that include reference to the importance of participation
- recruitment advertisement for young people
- outline of training sessions
- reports of consultations with disabled children and young people in different formats.

Contact details

Contact person and role: Ruth Marchant (co-director)

Address: Unit E1, The Knoll Business Centre, Old Shoreham Road, Hove, East Sussex BN1 7GS.

Tel: 01273 413 141

Email: ruth@triangle-services.co.uk

Website: www.triangle-services.co.uk

8. Voice and Influence of Young People Team, Cornwall Youth Service

Service provided by organisation

Cornwall Youth Service created the Voice and Influence Team in 2000 to develop its structures to consult with young people. The team's role is to ensure that participation is promoted within youth projects and the council, to support and facilitate district and countywide youth forums and to increase training and education opportunities for young people. It has a specific partnership project with social services for the voices of young people in care.

Characteristics of children/young people involved

Approximately 100 young people aged 13-19 are involved in the six district youth forums and the county youth forum. There is an even gender mix and the majority of members are white.

How participation has been developed

A Voice and Influence Development Plan sets out the team's aims about participation, the structure of staff and young people's involvement and identifies future work. The team has identified an individual responsible for developing participation, which is reflected in their job description. Although staff do not receive training about participation, they do deliver training about participation and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child to local authority staff.

The team has a specific budget for participation, which includes transportation costs. Youth forum news and development is highlighted in biannual newsletters that are distributed to secondary schools, youth projects and key partner agencies.

The core group of young people involved in the county youth forum has developed a manifesto that it has used to inform links, at a strategic level, with police, transport companies, health services and various strategic partnerships. The county youth forum runs a number of projects including: Promoting Active Democracy Loudly (PADL), where young people deliver training workshops to teachers and students; and Dreams to Reality, a fund managed by forum members to allocate grants to local young people to set up their own projects.

District youth forums focus on local issues and are regularly involved in consultations. Training is provided to forum members on residential courses and is delivered by experienced forum members. Members of the county youth forum

review their progress annually, and elements of their work have been evaluated externally.

Changes or improvements as a result of children and young people's participation

- the funding and establishment of projects run by and for young people
- young people taking more of a leading role in the management of the youth forums
- young people's involvement in staff recruitment within the youth service, health service, social services and the police
- raised profile of participation within the youth service, the police and health services through the development of the manifesto.

Evidence of outcomes from participation

The project has produced the following documentation to evidence the development of participation:

- job descriptions that include reference to the importance of participation
- Voice and Influence Development Plan
- Cornwall Youth Forums newsletter
- youth service outcomes poster
- external evaluation reports on training, PADL and the Participation and Advocacy Project

Contact details

Contact person and role: Nicky Davey (senior youth worker)
Address: 8a Truro Business Park, Threemilestone, Truro TR4 9NH
Tel: 07968 892 752
Email: v+i@youthcornwall.org.uk
Website: www.youthcornwall.org.uk

9. Reference Group, Cheshire and Warrington Connexions

Service provided by organisation

The Reference Group is jointly run by Connexions and the youth service. Connexions is the government's support service for all young people aged 13 to 19 in England. It provides advice, guidance and access to personal development opportunities to support a smooth transition to adulthood and working life.

Characteristics of children/young people involved

Approximately 30 young people aged 13-19 are involved in the Reference Group. Young people with an interest in youth services were recruited by personal advisers. It is a mixed-ability group, including young people with learning disabilities and one young person who is visually impaired.

How participation has been developed

The Reference Group was established in 2000 to help meet Connexions' key principle: to involve young people in the organisation's service delivery and planning. The group meets every month and involves two members of Connexions' staff – a youth participation consultant with a practical focus and a director with a strategic focus – and four members from youth parliament.

As a new service, the Reference Group has been involved in organising Connexions' organisational structures, and regularly meets with various members of Connexions, including the management board. The Reference Group has been involved in numerous activities including:

- producing job descriptions
- recruiting Connexions' and external organisations' staff
- producing a training video on active involvement
- peer consultancy work on local services
- designing publicity material
- auditing services funded by Connexions
- presenting at conferences
- voting on organisational decisions such as tender bids.

Members have also become Connexions staff, through 12 youth link worker roles in the region.

Participation is written in the organisation's mission statement and in the job descriptions of personal advisers, and is in guidance received by staff when they join Connexions. An 'Active Engagement' working group has been established, attended by team leaders for participation. There are also training review days about active involvement that staff at all levels of the organisation must attend. All staff are given a checklist of 'active involvement' to inform their work.

Changes or improvements as a result of children and young people's participation

The group has:

- redesigned the previous adult-led participation charter to produce the Young People's Entitlement Charter. This idea came from the group, as they wanted all local organisations to share a common language about involvement. All the local youth services have signed up to this.
- developed questionnaires for young people who access Connexions service. Personal advisers must get 50 young people from each school to respond to these each year.
- evaluated projects with Ofsted, which has been influenced by the value of involving young people
- highlighted young person-led issues, such as changing the opening hours of Connexions services to evenings during the week and Saturday mornings
- rebranded Connexions' publication material for young people.

Connexion also has a young person's active involvement plan.

[The young people's] panel isn't just talking and answering questions, it has a role ... I've got to know the youth services sector, an understanding of all the agencies involved, and the culture of the sector which has played a lot into my career plans and decisions. Now I'm training as a youth worker at university.

Young person

Evidence of outcomes from participation

The project has produced the following documentation to evidence the development of participation:

- Connexions' key objectives, which include the participation of young people
- job description
- group newsletter and minutes.

Contact details

Contact person and role: Linda Mottram (director of external affairs) or Zarah Quraishi (youth work participation consultant)
Address: 2 The Stables, Gadbrook Park, Northwich, Cheshire CW9 7RJ
Tel: 01606 305 202

10. Freaky Fabulous Funky Fun (4F) Centre, Barnardo's Catalyst Service

Service provided by organisation

The 4F Centre is an inclusive play centre, part of the Catalyst Service. The latter is a community development project that promotes the inclusion of disabled

children/young people and enables them to access community facilities and activities. The service also works with local statutory and voluntary services to ensure that the needs of children/young people and their families are met.

Characteristics of children/young people involved

The play centre is aimed at children aged 5–13 years old, and is an inclusive service for both disabled and non-disabled children.

How participation has been developed

The play centre was open in 2004 and was built in consultation with local children aged 5–13. Creative methods were used to gather the views of children about the centre, including the graphics and name for it, the plan of the centre and the equipment/activities that should be available.

A slogan for involving children has been designed by the children, as have the rules of the centre, both of which are included in the project's publicity material. Children are able to decide what activities they would like to do at the centre; the only restrictions imposed are to ensure their safety.

The centre has sought advice from the regional participation worker and consulted participation toolkits about how to involve children. Three young disabled people are employed by the service to attend staff meetings and to contribute to the delivery of the service and other developmental groups within the borough. These young people receive training to develop such things as communication skills. The centre is now aiming to have a central forum of children to inform the future development of the project and evaluate other local projects.

Changes or improvements as a result of children and young people's participation

- More responsive to children's needs and offers an appropriate service. 'You can ask them if they can get something if they don't have it. I asked them for a doll and they talked to me about getting it. Now they have dolls.' (Young person)
- Children have sense of ownership of the project and it is well used and respected in the local community.
- Children/young people feel more able to contribute their views, etc.
- Staff and colleagues are more children/young people-focused.

Evidence of outcomes from participation

The project has produced the following documentation to evidence the development of participation:

- report on the consultation process with children

- project aims, including the participation of children and young people in service development and voicing individual and collective concerns
- young people's rules for service.

Contact details

Contact person and role: Ken Williams (CSM)

Address: The Freaky Fabulous Funky Fun Centre, Old Lane, Warrington Road, Rainhill L35 0NE

Tel: 0151 426 9115

Email: ken.williams@barnardos.org.uk

11. Investing in Children, Durham and Darlington County Council

Service provided by organisation

Investing in Children creates opportunities for children and young people to engage in dialogue with services they access about issues that they have recognised as important and thus influence local policy-making.

Characteristics of children/young people involved

The organisation works with children and young people aged up to 21 years old, throughout County Durham. Since its origins in 1995, Investing in Children estimates that it has worked with over 7,000 children and young people, including those who are travellers and disabled young people.

How participation has been developed

There are currently more than 50 ongoing children and young people's groups that are researching issues in their own areas of interest. Each has its own budget and a member of staff who supports it. At the beginning of a new project, an 'agenda day' is held when a group of young people meet and agree on the agenda for a particular issue.

Groups are currently addressing a number of issues including:

- access to leisure services
- services for children with spina bifida
- public transport provision.

The activities that groups have taken part in include:

- service planning
- evaluating services
- producing publicity material and a monthly young person's newsletter (for which young people are paid to write articles)
- organising national and international conferences.

There is an Investing in Children reference group (the Decisions Group) and a council reference group, both of whom meet with strategic managers in each organisation and have been involved in staff recruitment and delivering training. Local services are supported to develop action plans involving children and young people. Those that can evidence that they are listening to children and young people receive Investing in Children membership.

The development of participation at Investing in Children is continuously being reviewed, with an open dialogue at the end of every project about what did and didn't work. When young people are involved in the development of services, reviews of the service are carried out six, nine and twelve months after the end of their involvement.

Changes or improvements as a result of children and young people's participation

- Children and young people appointed senior council and Investing in Children staff.
- Children and young people produced a statement of intent that all the local youth services have signed up to, one of the aims of which is to work in partnership with children and young people.
- Children and young people have influenced the development of new and appropriate services. For example, an Investing in Children card has been introduced so that young people can have discounted public transport. In addition, there is improved access to transport for young people in old pit villages in the region, a music night has been developed for young people and new equipment for the community centre has been bought.

It is felt that some of these decisions have been due to individuals in organisations rather than to structural changes. As a result, a training programme for organisations about involving children and young people has been developed.

Had lots of little changes like developing new leaflets, and new services like a skate park so seen change happen ... but it can be very slow.

Young person, aged 18

Evidence of outcomes from participation

The project has produced the following documentation to evidence the development of participation:

- Investing in Children statement of intent (established from framework of UN Convention on the Rights of the Child), which includes: 'Adults don't always know best ... we must listen to and learn from what children and young people have to say. This means creating opportunities for children and young people to have a voice in all decisions that affect them.'
- Investing in Children information package
- Evaluation from Durham University
'Investing in Children projects have been very successful in improving services across a very wide range of public provision ... Consultants typically feel that they have learnt a great deal about innovative youth work ... able to work with young people in non-judgemental, innovative ways.' (Evaluation report)
- Training pack on involving children and young people for practitioners and managers.
- Bi-monthly young person's newsletter.

Contact details

Contact person and role: Maria Brannen (children's rights officer)

Address: Moor Chambers, 23–26 Front Street, Framwellgate Moor, Durham DH1 5EJ

Tel: 0191 386 7485

Email: iic@durham.gov.uk

Website: www.durham.gov.uk/durhamcc/usp.nsf/pws/Investing+in+Children+-+IIC+-+Home+Page

12. Loughborough Youth Affairs, Youth Service

Service provided by organisation

Works with young people aged 11–25 years to enhance their personal and social development as well as create and develop partnerships with other agencies.

Currently operates approximately 40 groups.

Characteristics of children/young people involved

The core age group is between 13 and 19 years old and includes those not in education, refugees and asylum seekers, young people with mental health difficulties and disabled young people.

How participation has been developed

Giving young people a voice is a central principle of Loughborough Youth Affairs, and participation is deeply embedded in its practice.

Contact person and role: Andrew Lake (area youth work coordinator)

Address: Mountfields Lodge Youth Centre, Epinal Way, Loughborough, Leicestershire LE11 3GE

Participation is written into the organisation's mission statement, and through the project, the county council has adopted a youth charter written by young people.

The project has an open door policy to new members, and groups are accessible to the individual communities that they work with. Service delivery plans are developed with young people at the beginning of the work, and each group receives training about political campaigning and influence. Issues being addressed by current groups include:

- the establishment of a youth council to influence local decision-making

The project has produced the following documentation to evidence the development of participation:

- evaluations by county hall and Ofsted.
- mission statement
- Asian men's views about police stop-and-search
- asylum seeker's experiences of living in Loughborough.

Groups have also produced reports and held presentation events with MPs and local decision-makers.

Every 12 weeks, staff and young people in different groups assess what they have done and what they want to do. Young people can attend and contribute to any staff meeting. Many of the projects are run by young volunteers. Loughborough Youth Affairs also runs workshops about participation for outside organisations; these have included the involvement of young people as facilitators.

Changes or improvements as a result of children and young people's participation

- Groups have fed into the development of local strategies concerning youth crime, which has developed positive relations with local police.

Evidence of outcomes from participation

- 'Land of Dreams' report produced by asylum seekers group.

Contact details

Tel: 01509 236 043

13. Rights and Participation Project (RAPP), funded by Social Services, and the Warren Centre, with support from Connexions Humber

Service provided by organisation

Established in 1997, RAPP offers independent advice, support and advocacy to children and young people in need or at risk, aged between 9 and 21 years old.

Characteristics of children/young people involved

An inclusive project for young people aged between 9 and 21 years old, including some who are disabled.

How participation has been developed

Participation and listening to young people is emphasised throughout RAPP's literature and job descriptions and is stated in the 'RAPP code', the value base of the service.

Young people have been involved in: designing service information, staff recruitment, and service development by completing the 'snapshot review' questionnaire. The project works with children and young people to help them voice their views on the issues that are important to them and to influence local services.

Numerous young people's groups operate at the project: young trainers who run workshops for social work students and foster carers; a 'Bog Off Bullies' group, one that campaigns about the exclusion of young people with disabilities; a drama group for young people in care; and a peer-mentoring service.

RAPP works alongside other agencies to influence local services and the council. A regular young person's newsletter keeps young people and partner agencies informed about developments and opportunities at the project. RAPP also works with social services and other local agencies to ensure that young people are involved in shaping the services that they receive and that their views are listened to.

Changes or improvements as a result of children and young people's participation

- Involved in the consultation for the appointment of an appropriate disabled young people's advocacy worker.
- RAPP has reinforced the value of involving young people with other local agencies and is regarded as a key driver in promoting a children's rights approach.

A number of local agencies now involve young people in social services recruitment and selection.

Evidence of outcomes from participation

The project has produced the following documentation to evidence the development of participation:

- York University evaluation
- Social Services Inspectorate evaluation
- RAPP code
- young person's newsletter.

Contact details

Contact person and role: Craig Clark (coordinator/children's rights officer)
Address: 2nd floor, The Warren, 47–49 Queens Dock Avenue, Hull HU1 3DR
Tel: 01482 225 855

14. Dumfries and Galloway Youth Strategy Executive Group, Dumfries and Galloway Council

Service provided by organisation

The Youth Strategy Executive Group was established in 1997 to involve young people in strategic development, service planning, service delivery, research, policy development and evaluation within the council.

Characteristics of children/young people involved

Currently approximately 45 young people are involved in the group, aged between 14 and 25 years old. It is an open group: there are no elections and young people may join at any time.

How participation has been developed

The Youth Strategy Executive Group was established to provide young people with genuine opportunities to influence, rather than just be consulted. The group meets regularly on its own to discuss council business and meets with councillors five times a year. It highlights issues to raise with the council, carries out research on services within the region, is involved in senior council appointments, organises an annual youth conference, and has been consulted by various council departments. A significant area of work has been the Youth Strategy Development Fund where the group has made decisions about applications from local young people, in the process funding over 60 local projects.

The group has its own office at the council to which all group members have ongoing access. There is a specific budget for the group, which is used for a variety of purposes including supporting the local youth conference, attendance at other conferences, the youth festival, and the costs of young people's involvement and training, such as 'BORED meeting training', a training pack for young people on running meetings.

As well as the Youth Strategy Executive Group, there are subgroups including: the Promises Group (young people who evaluate local services that have received council funding), and the Hack Pack Writing Group (young people who write for the Dumfries and Galloway local pages on a national website.) The group is currently working to develop a young people's manifesto for the region.

Changes or improvements as a result of children and young people's participation

- The group has worked in partnership with the council to produce a 'measurements of success' development plan that sets out an action plan for services.
- Developing a localised version of the Young Scot card (young person's discount card now used for 'cashless catering' in schools, to be extended to leisure and transport).
- Identified which services are problematic for young people. It is hoped that, as a result, some of the services will become more appropriate for young people. For example, young people have improved access to leisure facilities and subsidised bus fares.
- Supported service development, such as influencing the development of the 'C card' (a sexual health initiative, including condom distribution) through the council's committee process.

'[Young people] have their say. Before, young people were overlooked in consultation, so an opportunity to have their say.'

Young person

Evidence of outcomes from participation

The project has produced the following documentation to evidence the development of participation:

- annual reports
- minutes of meetings
- development plan
- publicity material
- youth conference reports.

Contact details

Contact person and role: Ian Donaldson (youth strategy coordinator)

Address: Council Offices, English Street, Dumfries DG1 2PS

Tel: 01387 260 041

Email: IanDo2@dumgal.gov.uk

15. Speakout Initiative, Staffordshire Youth Service

Service provided by organisation

Speakout, established in 1999, is managed by Staffordshire Youth Service and is the county council's process for consulting and involving young people in community action. It consists of eight district youth forums whose members are from local youth groups, and a collection of young people from social services forums representing young carers and young people in care and leaving care. Each district youth forum also elects four young people to represent them at the Youth Action Council (YAK) at a countywide level. There is also annual elections for the Staffordshire UK Youth Parliament (UKYP), when eight young people are elected to represent the young people of Staffordshire at county, regional and national level

Characteristics of children/young people involved

Mainly aged 11–19, and of mixed ethnicity and gender. Special needs schools are also offered places on the Council.

How participation has been developed

Young people's elections are held for positions on the UKYP and are well publicised throughout schools in Staffordshire. Over a third of the young people in the area voted in the last election.

Each local forum meets fortnightly. The Youth Action Council (YAK) – which, since 1999, has increased its membership from 32 to 56 young people – meets monthly and has its own budget. It also holds quarterly meetings of the Leaders' Advisory Body, comprising some elected members and heads of services. It has also met with the cabinet to look at key decision-making.

Positions on YAK, such as chair, finance and promotions, are all occupied by young people. The agendas for the forums are set by young people, and decisions over funding and applying for external bids are made in partnership with the Council. Young people have been involved in staff recruitment within the youth service and county council and have recently changed the YAK constitution. The project communicates and consults with young people via a website and text-messaging service.

The forums have carried out research with other young people into local services, consulted with decision-makers, had input into county council and youth websites, informed the youth service's five-year review plan and organised conferences on issues including policing, community safety and health.

YAK has created a youth charter, and participation is written into all job descriptions. There are eight participation worker roles across the county. Young people receive accreditation and a letter of recommendation from the council for their involvement.

Changes or improvements as a result of children and young people's participation

- Four working party groups have been established on the key targets that young people have identified, to ensure that the forums do not get consulted on everything and are able to prioritise what they have identified as important.
- Produced a participation strategy for Staffordshire.
- Produced a youth charter for all young people in the youth service
- Young people are involved in the recruitment of all youth work staff. For this, they receive recruitment and selection training.
- Through consultation and the work of the forums, some local services have made their services more appropriate to young people – e.g. new transport routes have been introduced.
'The needs and expectations of young people have changed. Become more versatile and adopted the needs of everyone. Have had achievement in some areas.' (Young person)

Evidence of outcomes from participation

The project has produced the following documentation to evidence the development of participation:

- reports of conferences
- mission statement of youth forum
- How we want to be heard – a guide by young people for decision-makers
- youth charter for youth service.

Contact details

Contact person and role: Gail Lucas (participation coordinator)
Address: Talbot Street, Rugeley, Staffordshire WS15 2SG
Tel: 01889 256 188
Email: gail.lucas@staffordshire.gov.uk

16. The Voices Project, Cumbria Youth Alliance

Service provided by organisation

The Cumbria Youth Alliance is the umbrella organisation for the voluntary youth sector in Cumbria. Voices is one of its key projects and aims to support and enable young people to have a voice in their local community and to interact with key decision-makers and policy-makers. Voices is led, managed and evaluated by young people and is supported by two adult youth workers. The project is currently funded by the Carnegie Trust and Voluntary Action Cumbria.

Characteristics of children/young people involved

Voices involves young people aged between 13 and 25 years old throughout Cumbria. They usually become involved through Youth Alliance projects or through the membership of the Cumbria Youth Alliance. Local youth groups were also asked to choose Voice representatives.

The project consists of young people of mixed gender. All are white, and many come from socially disadvantaged backgrounds such as the care system.

How participation has been developed

Voices was set up in 2000 with the aim of involving children and young people in local services in Cumbria. It has two members of staff and a core group of 15 young people who guide the project.

Young people are involved at every level, including the steering group that influences the project's development. They have designed a Voices website and newsletter to ensure that the project is accessible to young people. There is a cycle of young people 'moving up' within the project and attaining increasing levels of involvement. The current coordinator began his involvement in Voices as a member, then became a volunteer and, finally, a staff member.

When young people first join the group, they undergo a training needs analysis and relevant training is then provided. To ensure that Voices remains relevant to young people, only young people decide which issues the group should address. Because of the large distances that some members have to travel across Cumbria, the group often meets on residential rather than at daytime sessions.

Through Voices, young people have been involved in:

- recruiting the chief executive of the youth service
- delivering workshops to other young people in youth projects/organisations on issues such as drugs awareness
- peer research to identify possible issues/needs within Cumbria, such as a rural isolation/social exclusion programme

- planning of 'Big Fest', a day celebrating youth culture that was attended by more than 400 young people.

Changes or improvements as a result of children and young people's participation

- Developed young people's skills in working in communities.
- Developing transferable skills such as citizenship and key skills
- Gaining qualifications in peer research
- Providing young people with a sense of achievement and knowledge that they have contributed to their community
- As a result of the project, one young person was nominated for a national award for their work in the community.

The project wouldn't exist without young people running it. It is a totally young person-led organisation. Through this, I believe that other organisations in the local area have realised how important and beneficial involving young people is. The issues which have been highlighted and events which have been produced were all directly because of the young people involved.

Young person

Evidence of outcomes from participation

The project has produced the following documentation to evidence the development of participation:

- peer research training programme, accredited by the Open College Network
- report from two youth-led conferences
- training programmes developed by young people for young people on issues including drugs awareness, getting involved in politics, and rural isolation
- monthly newsletter.

Contact details

Contact person and role: Cath Clarke (chief officer) or Jonathan Parr (coordinator)

Address: Cumbria Youth Alliance, 54a Main Street, Cockermouth CA13 9LQ

Tel: 01900 822 110

Email: cath@cya.co.uk / jonathan@cya.co.uk

Website: www.cya.co.uk

17. Wakefield Children's Grants, Wakefield Children's Fund and Barnardo's

Service provided by organisation

The Children's Fund is a national government scheme that provides services and support to children and young people aged 5 to 15 years old who are at most risk of social exclusion.

Characteristics of children/young people involved

Currently 34 young people aged 11–14 are involved in four grant-giving panels, and a total of 239 children have been involved in designing information, applying for grants, and judging applications.

How participation has been developed

The Children's Grants initiative was set up in June 2003 to involve children throughout the process of grant allocation and application. A group of young people initially met regularly to develop publicity and application information about the initiative and launched a children's logo competition.

The grant application is flexible and can involve pictures/scrapbooks showing the ways that a project would benefit from funding. The key criteria is that the application must be child- rather than adult-led. Using a checklist, the children's grants panel decide whether a grant should be awarded and, if so, for how much (awards range from £200 to £2,000).

The first grant was awarded by the panel in April 2004. The initiative has since grown to involve three young people's judging panels and is managed by a participation officer.

Participation of young people is a key principle of the Children's Fund: it organises a participation network for key practitioners in Wakefield, participation is highlighted in all job descriptions and children are involved in the recruitment of all staff. As part of the criteria for funding, all Children's Fund projects must be able to demonstrate a commitment to participation.

Change or improvement as a result of children and young people's participation

- The Children's Fund has been able to finance a wider range of services, including some for children that were not accessing funding previously.
- The local services that have been funded are able to offer services more appropriate for children.

We can make sure that it is young people who write the applications. We know what young people want better than adults so can make sure that money is given out properly. We understand more and are less harsh than some adults can be on applications. This has worked because we are given the chance to make decisions.

Young person

Evidence of outcomes from participation

The project has produced the following documentation to evidence the development of participation:

- The Wakefield Children's Fund delivery plan, which includes participation and 'young person-centred services' as key principles of the organisation.

Contact details

Contact person and role: Caroline Free (participation officer)

Address: WCF, ground floor, Fell House, Market Street, Wakefield WF1 1DF

Tel: 01924 380 165

Email: caroline.free@barnardos.org.uk

18. Youthcomm, Worcestershire Youth Service

Service provided by organisation

Youthcomm is a free confidential telephone information service, radio station and internet forum, which provides advice and support to young people aged 13–25 years old. The service is run by volunteers 16–25 years old and a small staff team.

Characteristics of children/young people involved

Currently approximately 50 young people are involved as volunteers, aged 16–25.

How participation has been developed

The underlying principle of the service is to listen to young people. This is reflected in the mission statement and all service publicity material. Youthcomm has been developed, and is largely run, by volunteer young people (there are only five members of paid staff). As volunteers, young people are directly involved in providing a service to other young people. The communication management of the project is maintained by the volunteers via an email/text-messaging service and confidential online forum.

They receive eight weeks of youth service OCN-accredited training for radio work and a bespoke 12-week OCN-accredited course for Youthline. The training can be up to GNVQ level if that's what they want.

Young people are involved in all decisions about the service and are part of the management structure. When new sources of funding for the project were needed, the project worked with young people to develop an action plan to diversify the services and activity of Youthline. A voting system was devised so that young people would be involved in future service plans and decision-making. This has included the development of remote Youthline call centres in youth centres around the country to enable young people to train as operators, and of interactive 'e-voting' consultation road shows.

There are opportunities for young people to progress through the service from volunteer to team leader to a management position and then to be employed in one of the two youth worker posts.

The project has been evaluated by Ofsted, the Department for Education and Science and NFE. The model of involvement of young people that is offered by the project is highly respected by other local council services.

Changes or improvements as a result of children and young people's participation

- '[Involving young people] completely changes the project. We've expanded to offices and been able to look at the reasons why young people think something doesn't work. The project doesn't conform, it's really dynamic because of the way it involves young people. There wouldn't even be a Youthcomm without the young people so it's really hard to imagine specific changes as it is everything.' (Young person)
- Young people are able to promote their own activities and issues via the communications developed with other young people and youth organisations.
- It has enabled local decision-makers to take into account the views of young people when developing strategic plans and the needs and development of new services through the 'youthink' consultations.
- Youthcomm's approach has been used by other parts of the county council in consulting with communities, particularly to the youth service's partnership work with the Children's Fund in consulting with children.
- Youthcomm's approach to involving young people has achieved a high profile nationally with the Learning and Skills Development Agency, and has been used by the latter to develop its post-16 citizenship education in informal settings.

Evidence of outcomes from participation

The project has produced the following documentation to evidence the development of participation:

- history and development of the project
- 'The big learning curve': Educating the educators pack
- Post-16 citizenship video (a plan for informal education).

Contact details

Contact person and role: Adrian Newman (senior youth worker)

Address: Youthcomm, St John's Youth Centre, Swanpool Walk, St John's, Worcester
WR2 4EL

Tel: 01905 748 370

Email: anewman@youthcomm.org.uk

Website: www.youthcomm.org.uk/

Useful organisations and websites

Participation

The following websites are focused on children and young people's participation and children's rights:

A National Voice

www.anationalvoice.org

A site run by and for young people in care.

Article 12

www.article12.com

A children's rights-based organisation run by and for children and young people.

British Youth Council

www.byc.org.uk

An organisation run by and for young people to represent their views to decision makers and to promote youth participation.

Carnegie Young People's Initiative

www.carnegie-youth.org.uk

An organisation committed to promoting young people's participation in policy making and practice.

Children's Express

www.childrens-express.org

A web based newspaper produced by children and young people.

Children's Rights Alliance

www.crae.org.uk

An alliance of over 180 organisations committed to promoting children's human rights.

Children's Rights Information Network

www.crin.org

A global network disseminating information about the UNCRC and developments relating to children's rights.

Children Rights Officers and Advocates

www.croa.org.uk

A site for those working in children's rights and advocacy services.

Common Purpose

www.commonpurpose.org.uk

An independent citizenship organisation with a young people's section.

Schools Council UK

www.schoolcouncils.org

A site providing information and resources on setting up and sustaining school councils.

UK Youth Parliament

www.ukyp.org.uk

A site listing the work of the UKYP, discussion forums and links to local youth parliaments

General

The following websites contain information on children and young people's participation, including examples of participation research, practice or campaigns:

Barnardo's

www.barnardos.org.uk

The Children's Society

www.thechildrenssociety.org.uk

Joseph Rowntree Foundation

www.jrf.org.uk

National Children's Bureau

www.ncb.org.uk

National Youth Agency

www.nya.org.uk

Save the Children

www.savethechildren.org.uk

UNICEF
www.unicef.org

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Methodology

Research, literature and policy review

A review of literature, policy and research relating to participation was undertaken, drawing on data from:

- previous publications developed by Barnardo's Policy and Research Unit
- thorough search of relevant databases: Medline, Barnardo's Library, Social Sciences Citation Index, British Nursing Index, PsycINFO, Sociological Abstracts, ChildData, Zetoc, Cinahl, Social Services Abstracts, Copac/BL, CareData, DH-Data, EMBASE. Searches were undertaken using the following sets of search terms:
 - Set 1: children/young people/teenage/juvenile/youth
 - Set 2: participation/involvement/inclusion/consult
 - Set 3: decision-making/service provision/service delivery/governance
 - Set 4: guide/framework/toolkit/charter/standard/standards

All four sets of terms were used, except in cases where search findings were low or zero, in which case Set 4 was omitted.

As the search terms identified a large number of references, all results were scanned online and only references relating to children and young people's participation were retrieved.

- web search of organisations working in the areas of research and/or practice with children and young people
- internet search using search engines (including Google, Yahoo!, Lycos, Alta Vista and Ask Jeeves) and key search terms as identified above.

Practice consultation

Consultations with young people and practitioners/managers involved in participation initiatives were undertaken to inform:

- the structure of the practice guide
- the content of the practice guide
- the criteria for the inclusion of case studies.

Consultation with young people

- Consultation activities were undertaken with young people from Barnardo's UK Reference Group.
- This group was selected as it represents:
 - young people who have had experience of being involved in decision-making processes within both voluntary and statutory social care organisations
 - young people from across the UK: Northern Ireland, Scotland, Wales and England
 - young people with experience of accessing a range of social care agencies including: disability support services, 'looked after' system, mental health services, young carers services and children's rights services
 - an inclusive group of young people that included disabled young people and those from minority ethnic groups.
- Fifteen young people were consulted, using a storyboard exercise to prompt discussion about how organisations can develop effective participation.
- All the young people received a flyer informing them about the consultation exercise, a certificate to thank them for their involvement and a feedback document summarising the main findings from the exercise.

Consultation with participation managers/practitioners

- Practitioners and managers responsible for developing participation within voluntary and statutory organisations were identified through the Carnegie Young People Initiative Participation Network.
- Seven practitioners and managers attended a semi-structured focus group. An additional four individuals were interviewed over the telephone.
- The practitioners and managers represented:
 - both voluntary and statutory social care organisations
 - organisations providing a range of social care services
 - organisations from across the UK, including Scotland, England and Northern Ireland.

Identification of case studies

Phase 1: Identification of mapping exercises

- As a number of mapping exercises had recently been undertaken to inform the development of participation practice, contact was made with the following projects to gather details of case studies that might be relevant:

- National Children’s Bureau: had undertaken a large scale mapping exercise to inform the development of the publication Building a Culture of Participation (2003)
- Barnardo’s ‘Investing in Children’ Award Scheme: initiative to identify best practice examples of participation within Barnardo’s
- The ‘Taking part’ toolkit: Barnardo’s undertook a mapping exercise of participation in the North West to inform the development of The ‘Taking part’ toolkit: Promoting the real participation of children and young people (2002)
- National Youth Agency: had undertaken an audit of participation initiatives across England, sending out questionnaires to a range of agencies to inform the development of Mapping children and young people’s participation in England (2004).

Phase 2: Identification of preliminary list of case studies

- Case studies from the above studies were selected to represent:
 - all regions and nations within the UK, both rural and inner-city areas
 - practice within social care
 - development of participatory practice within one or more of the following areas: culture, structure, practice and review
 - a range of different groups of children and young people including: disabled, gay and lesbian, black and minority ethnic groups, younger children.
- Any ‘gaps’ in the selection of case studies were then identified (i.e. groups/areas that were under-represented). Specific agencies were targeted to ensure these gaps were addressed where possible.

Phase 3: Identification of final list of case studies

- A pro forma (based on criteria identified by the consultation process and literature/research/policy review) was developed for the collation of information from each case study.
- Each case study was contacted and further information gathered by:
 - conducting telephone interviews with the practitioner responsible for developing participation within the organisation
 - consulting a child/young person who had participated within the organisation (either by telephone or with the support of a practitioner from the organisation)
 - requesting evidence of the development of participatory practice within the organisation and the associated outcomes – e.g. evaluation reports.

PARTICIPATION PRACTICE GUIDE 06

Following the final consultation process, all case studies that could evidence changes/improvements in their organisation as a result of involving children and young people were selected for inclusion in the practice guide.