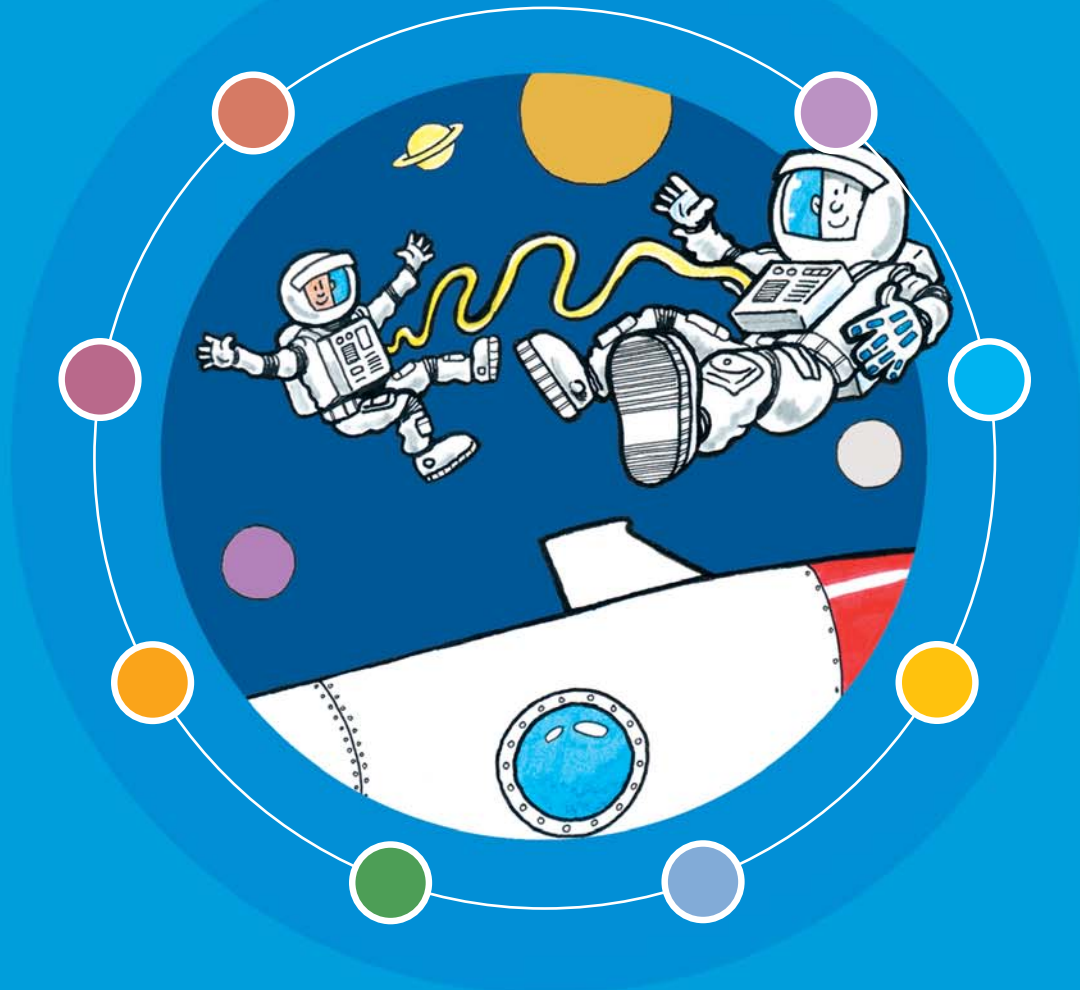


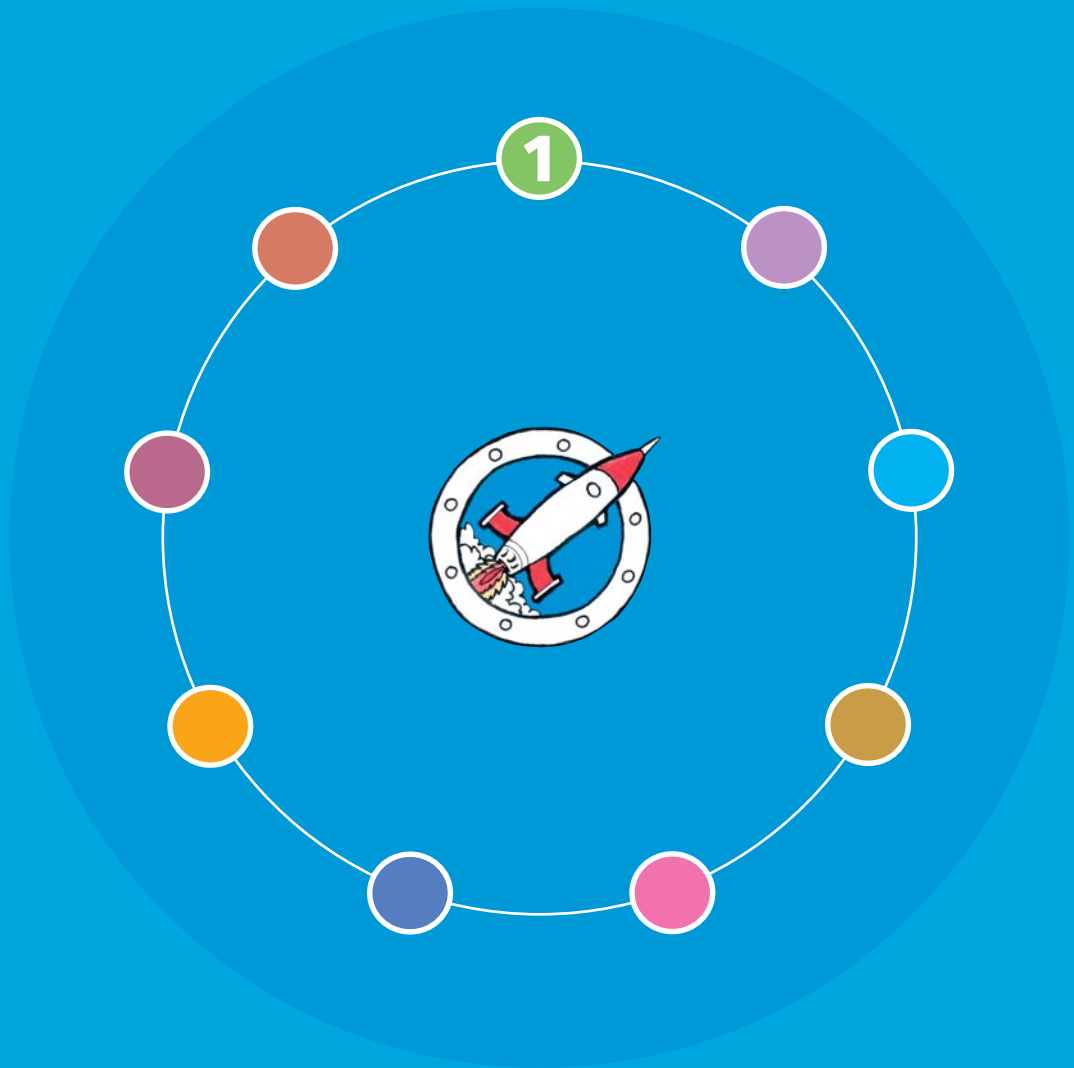


**GUIDES TO INCREASING PARTICIPATION
OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE**

1

INTRODUCTION TO PARTICIPATION





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2007

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? Who are the guides for?

The guides are designed as help sheets with practical tools and to signpost to good practice and specific resources. They draw on the wealth of experience of workers across Wales. They are for practitioners who work with, or in, services that have an impact on children and young people.

They build on good practice in engaging with, and communicating with, children and young people. The series emphasises the importance of raising the profile of participation within the culture of an organisation.

? What will this guide tell me?

This guide is a brief introduction to the series and to the concept of participation. It is aimed at those wanting to increase their understanding of the importance of participation of children and young people in decision-making and policymaking (and of the Welsh context).

In addition to the guides (see Box 1), there is the Guides Flowchart to assist readers in finding the most relevant guide for their current needs. The Flowchart and all the guides are available from the Children and Young People's Participation Consortium or via the Save the Children website - Wales section, as pdf files: www.savethechildren.org.uk

Box 1: The current list of completed guides and guides in development* includes:

- 1: Introduction to Participation
- 2: Making the Case for Participation
- 3: Participation Strategies
- 4: Children and Young People Friendly Documents
- 5: Alternatives to Documents
- 6: Working with Under 11s
- 7: Ensuring Inclusion
- 8: Monitoring, Evaluation and Audit
- 9: Resources and Support
10. *Rewards, Accreditation and Remuneration**
11. *Participation of Children and Young People in Recruitment**
12. *Budget Monitoring**



What are the Children and Young People's Participation Consortium for Wales, The Participation Unit and the Welsh Assembly Government Participation Project?

Children and Young People's Participation Consortium

The Participation Consortium is a multi-agency strategic body. It is working at a national level to develop capacity and practice in terms of the participation of children and young people (0-25 years) in decision-making in Wales. The Consortium was initiated in 2003 by The Welsh Assembly Government and current membership includes: Black Voluntary Sector Network, Cardiff Black Youth Network, Children in Wales, Council for Wales of Voluntary Youth Services, Funky Dragon, Framework for Partnership Co-ordinators, Tros Gynnal, Voices from Care, Save the Children, WCVA, Canllaw Online, The Youth and Adult Learning Opportunities Division of the Welsh Assembly Government (WAG), the Children's Commissioner's Office, Youth Forum Workers, Barnardos, CAF/CASS, Carnegie Young People Initiative, CEWC, CLIC, NSPCC and Principal Youth Officers. A consortium approach to developing participation ensures co-ordination and the sharing of good practice, avoids duplication and acknowledges diversity.

Participation Unit

The Participation Consortium received funding from the WAG Children and Family Grants Scheme and the European Social Fund to establish a Participation Unit in 2004. The Consortium steers the work of the Unit, which is hosted by Save the Children. The Unit acts as a focal point and supports the strategic development of participation.

Working Together

The Participation Consortium and the Participation Unit are working together at a national level. They are also working with the WAG Participation Project which aims to involve children and young people in the work of the Welsh Assembly Government and other large statutory organisations.

The Participation Consortium commissioned a mapping exercise in 2004/05 with the Participation Unit and the Welsh Assembly Government to find out the extent to which children and young people participate in decision-making and policymaking about the services that affect them in Wales.



From that exercise, it became clear that the participation of children and young people in decision-making varied widely across Wales. However, there was a general recommendation for good practice guidance to be more readily available, along with examples of what practitioners were already doing. There were also key areas where practice guidance was felt to be particularly necessary, for example in working with the under 11s and reaching those children and young people deemed to be 'hard to reach'. These guides are a response to this identified need.

What do we mean by Participation?

The literal definition of participation is 'taking part'. It is well recognised that there is a spectrum of degrees of power in taking part, from giving opinions on a predetermined issue for adults to decide upon (consultation), to young people choosing their agenda and taking their own decisions (full participation). As with many powerful and popular concepts, 'participation' is used (and sometimes abused) to describe many different relationships and activities. As Crowley explains:

Participation is a process not an event and Empowerment is the outcome.
(Crowley, A. 2004)

Roger Hart (Hart, 1992) provides an alternative way of looking at participation that incorporates consultation as one of the many methods of participation. Hart's famous 'ladder' has seven levels of participation ranging from 'manipulative' and 'decorative' at the bottom of the ladder, to child initiated projects and sharing decision making with adults, at the top.

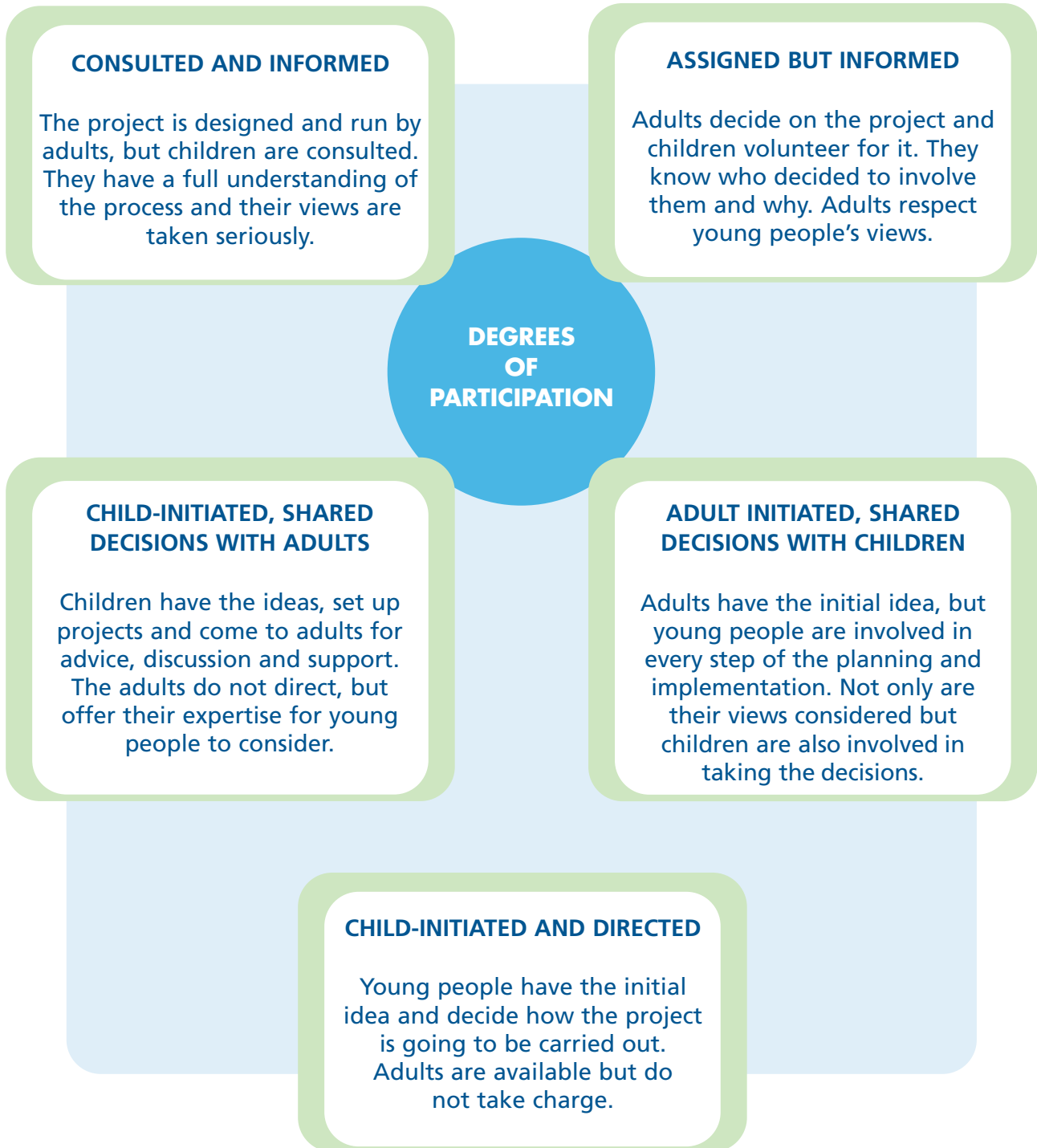
Hart's ladder seems to suggest that all participation of children and young people should be on the highest rung. In recent years, some commentators have questioned the use of the ladder concept as it implies a hierarchy of value. A more useful model is that illustrated below, displaying the degrees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

The Welsh Assembly Government held a competition to develop a sound-bite for the definition of participation. The following definition has been adopted as a result by the Welsh Assembly Government and the Children and Young People's Participation Consortium for Wales:

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



Chart 1: Five Degrees of Participation



Source: Treseder, P. (1997)



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

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

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

The status and position of children in our society has not traditionally allowed children to be considered 'competent actors' in their own right; rather they have been viewed as 'not yet's' or 'little people in the making'. There is work to be done in developing the skills and confidence of adults to ensure that they can appropriately support children and young people to participate, as well as in developing the skills and confidence of children and young people themselves.

Over recent years in Wales, the number and type of activities designed to facilitate children and young people's participation have developed. As this has happened, young people have increasingly questioned the sincerity of some approaches and requested that their participation in policy and service development should include the following:

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

It is essential to provide child or young people friendly information to children or young people before they are consulted or involved. This information needs to help them to understand the purpose and the process so that they can make an informed choice about their participation. This also reinforces the voluntary nature of their participation. In addition they need information to help them to understand the subject matter; this enables them to contribute constructively and effectively (**See Guide Four: Children and Young People Friendly Documents**).

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



Why encourage children and young people to participate?

All children and young people are entitled to participate. Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (see **Box 2**) states that children have the right to express their views and opinions on all matters that affect them, and to have those views valued and taken into account.

Box 2: United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child was formally adopted as the basis of all the Welsh Assembly Government's work with children and young people in a **plenary debate on 14 January 2004**. www.wales.gov.uk
Article 12 sets out the right of children and young people to express an opinion and to have that opinion taken into account, in any matter of procedure that affects them. This was set out in 'Rights to Action' (Welsh Assembly Government, 2002)

The Minister for Education, Culture and the Welsh Language (Carwyn Jones) has the lead responsibility for developing children and young people's participation aged 0-25 years within the Welsh Assembly Government.

Participation is part of the process of valuing and respecting children and young people and including them in a democratic society. There are also political, social and economic reasons to do this. Services and policies will be more effective and efficient when they are planned, delivered and evaluated on the basis of the identified needs of the people using them, and with their involvement. For further details on this see **Guide 2: Making the Case**.

Box 3: Sound bite – Having a voice, having a choice

A national definition of what participation means in Wales was established through a competition for young people. The winning 'sound bite' was:

Participation means that it is my right to be involved in making decisions, planning and reviewing an action that might affect me.

Having a voice, having a choice.

The aim of the sound bite is to develop a shared understanding of participation in a short and easy to understand way for both adults and young people.



Who benefits from participation?

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

For more details about the benefits of participation to children and young people, communities and to organisations see **Guide 2: Making the Case**.



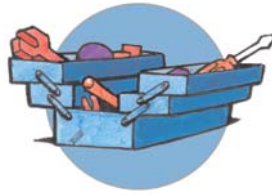
Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

Twelve tough questions for adults to ask themselves before asking children and young people to participate:

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?

(See also Funky Dragon, *Breathing Fire*, p25 *Take the respect quiz* for more useful questions to ask yourselves).

Also, Youth Forum Workers across Wales have developed a 'participation protocol' – a form that organisations and agencies need to complete prior to requesting consultation with or the participation of young people within the Forums. The protocol gets organisations to stop and think about the quality of the participation process before they go about involving young people.



RESOURCES

Crowley, A. 2004, *Children and Young People's Participation: Working Towards a Definition*. Save the Children.

Hart, Roger A. *Children's Participation – From Tokenism to Citizenship*. UNICEF International Child Development Centre.

Smail, P. and Crowley, A. 2005, *Mapping Participation and Mapping Participation: Welsh Assembly Government Divisions*. Save the Children and Welsh Assembly Government.

Treseder, P. 1997, *Empowering Children and Young People Training Manual: Promoting Involvement in Decision-making*. Save the Children.

Welsh Assembly Government 2000, *Extending Entitlement*. www.wales.gov.uk

Welsh Assembly Government 2002, *Children and Young People: Rights to Action*. www.wales.gov.uk

WEBSITES

Children and Young People's Participation Consortium for Wales, based at Save the Children (Wales)
www.savethechildren.org.uk

Welsh Assembly Government Participation Project, based at Youth and Adult Learning Opportunities Division
www.wales.gov.uk

Carnegie Young People Initiative
www.carnegieuktrust.org.uk/cypi/home

National Youth Agency, England – have developed Hear by Right project on participation of children and young people and organisational change
www.nya.org.uk

Participation Workers' Network for Wales
www.childreninwales.org.uk