

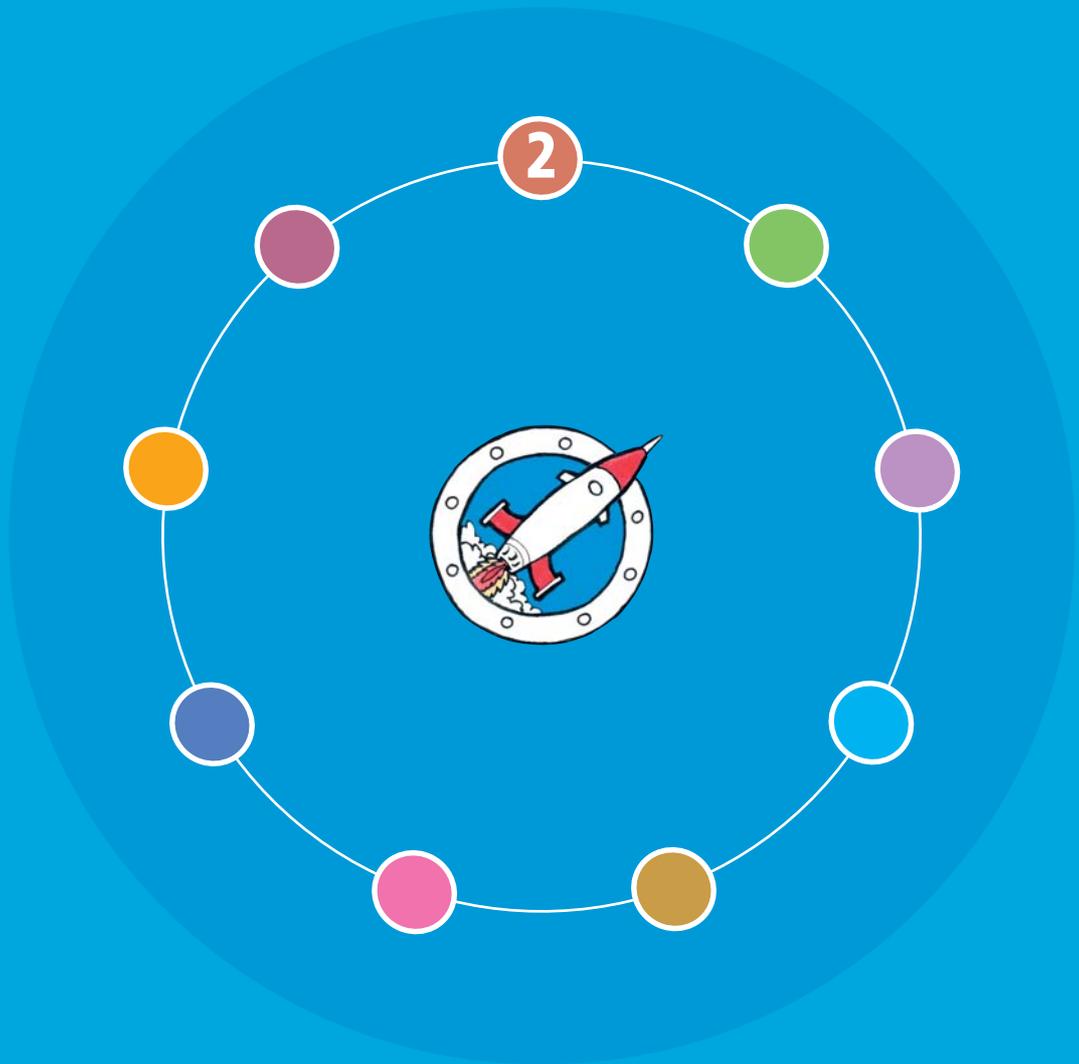


**GUIDES TO INCREASING PARTICIPATION
OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE**

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MAKING THE CASE





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What will this guide tell me?

This guide outlines the case for the participation of children and young people in decision making and policymaking in Wales. It looks at the legal and Welsh context and outlines the benefits to individuals, communities and organisations.

How to make the case to increase the participation of children and young people in decision making and policy making in an organisation

The case can be made in two main ways. Firstly, using the international legal framework of human rights, the UNCRC and Article 12. This is a 'Rights based approach' to participation. Secondly, we can make the case by describing the potential benefits for individual children and young people, for communities and for organisations.

It is important to build up your own local evidence of the benefits as work progresses. These can include direct benefits for children and young people and indirect benefits through improved and more responsive local services. There can also be demonstrable benefits for the organisation in improved targeting, access to and use of local services.

In addition, funding sources or funding bodies, such as Cymorth and The Big Lottery, increasingly require evidence of beneficiary participation in the planning, development, implementation and evaluation of a project for it to be funded.

How to make the case – using the legal framework and the Welsh context

In November 1989, the United Nations General Assembly unanimously adopted the Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). In Dec 1991, the United Kingdom government signed up to ('ratified') the Convention. In line with this the Welsh Assembly Government has made a commitment to promote and support children and young people's participation and to implementing children and young people's right to participate as stated in Article 12 through formally adopting the UNCRC (**See Box 1**).

The right to participation gives children and young people the ability to claim all the other rights as expressed in the UNCRC. It is the 'gateway' to their accessing health, education, leisure and other rights. In other words, children and young people's right to participate in all matters affecting them is *instrumental* to achieving all of the other rights as expressed in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.



Every five years the United Kingdom has to provide a report to the Committee on the Rights of the Child of the United Nations, reviewing the implementation of the Convention. The next UK government report is due to be submitted July 2007.

Box 1: United Nation Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) Article 12

Article 12 of the UNCRC states that Children have a right to say what they think should happen, when adults are making decisions that affect them, and to have their opinions taken into account.

Funky Dragon, the Children and Young People's Assembly for Wales, have developed a very effective short animated film for young people on the story of children's rights, the UNCRC and participation called **Our Rights, Our Story**. This can be accessed on their website www.funkydragon.org

Young people's participation in service and policy development has a relatively long history in Wales particularly in the voluntary sector. The *Youth Work Curriculum Statement for Wales*, agreed in 1992, explicitly supports the principle of young people's participation. The *Youth Work Strategy for Wales* and the *Youth Work Curriculum Statement for Wales* have recently been reviewed but retain the commitment to participation as an integral strand of youth work policy and practice.

Another important policy development has been the EU White Paper, *A New Impetus for European Youth*, (2002) which strongly emphasises the need for young people's participation.

As a result of the Welsh Assembly Government's commitment to the UNCRC Article 12, structures have been put in place and opportunities for children and young people's participation in decision-making have increased. Wales was the first of the UK countries to have a Children's Commissioner established by the Care Standards Act 2000. The Commissioner is required to have regard to the UNCRC in his work (Welsh Assembly Government 2001).

The Welsh Assembly has supported the setting up of Funky Dragon (Children and Young People's Assembly for Wales), the Children and Young People's Participation Consortium for Wales, the Participation Unit and the Welsh Assembly Government Participation Project (For further details see **Guide 1: Introduction to Participation**).



Legislation, policy and practice increasingly promote children and young people's participation (See Crowley A. and Croke R (Eds.) 2006). There are also many new posts being set up across Wales. The Participation Consortium has set up a Participation Practitioners' Network for Wales, based at Children in Wales, www.childreninwales.org.uk to support any workers who are involved or interested in developing the participation agenda in different areas and sectors across Wales. For further details see **Guide 9: Resources and Support**.

How to make the case - describing the benefits

Benefits to the individual

Participation provides the opportunity for children and young people's personal, social and political development. Participation can offer practical experience and the opportunity to learn how to exercise responsibility.

Children and young people's participation brings a number of benefits to the individual children involved (See Box 2). These also include:

- Direct improvements in their own lives and life chances e.g. improved services.
- The possibility to protect themselves and challenge abuses of their rights, either directly or through informing a responsible adult.
- Enhanced self-confidence and self esteem.
- An opportunity to acquire and expand their skills, including problem-solving, negotiation and communication skills.
- Familiarisation with group and democratic processes, including understanding different points of view, the need for compromise and a sense of responsibility for group decisions.
- A sense of purpose and competence in their own lives - a belief that they can make a positive impact on their own lives and on the lives of their peers, family and community.
- An opportunity to learn and practice the skills of responsible and active citizenship.

Box 2: Benefits to Children and Young People

Gains for the individual listed by Funky Dragon, the Children and Young People's Assembly for Wales (2002) as:

- A voice and influence.
- Updated services.
- Self-development.
- Social and political education.
- We become creators not consumers.
- Participation in wider society.
- Democracy.

(Funky Dragon Annual Report, 2002)



Benefits to organisations

Children and young people's participation has benefits for organisations in that it:

- Enhances relationships
- Increases organisational relevance to children
- Improves organisational ability to achieve outcomes
- Assists organisations to effectively target funds
- Enhances organisational credibility and reputation
- Offers organisations a wider variety of perspectives
- Improves organisational systems
- Helps build capacity and sustainability within an organisation.

Gains for organisations also listed by Funky Dragon, the Children and Young People's Assembly for Wales (2002):

- Services and policies that are designed, delivered and evaluated on the basis of identified needs of children and young people
- Services that are more effective
- Services that are more credible with young people and which safeguard us
- You will be meeting government/Assembly targets and expectations
- You will also be contributing to the personal, social and political development of children and young people in Wales.

Benefits to the community

Participation empowers children and young people as members of civil society and active citizens. The practice of participation strengthens children's ability to hold organisations, institutions and governments to account. It enables children to play an active part in civil society and to compensate for their exclusion from formal political processes. It increases the visibility of children and children's issues ensuring that they are given greater weight in economic, social and political agendas. By increasing accountability to children, it enlarges the democratic space and encourages good governance.

How to build your own evidence

We are constantly building the case for children and young people's participation in Wales. The Participation Consortium has developed an *impact assessment tool* (See **Guide 8: Monitoring, Evaluation and Audit**) that organisations and children and young people can use to gather their *own* evidence on the benefits and impact of participation. This tool has been piloted and is currently being developed further by the Consortium for a second piloting phase with agencies and organisations. It explores the impacts of participation in three 'core' areas: on the children and young people, on the organisation and on the community.



RESOURCES

For signposts to general resources on Participation see Guide 9: Resources and Support.

Aspinwall, T. Crowley, A. and Larkins, C. 2003, *Listen Up! Children and Young People Talk about their Rights in Education*. Save the Children

Crowley, A. and Croke, R (Eds.) 2006, *Righting the Wrongs: The Reality of Children's Rights in Wales Chapter 3 Participation*. Save the Children

Crowley, A. and Vuillaume, C. 2002, *Listen Up!: Children and Young People Talk About Poverty*. Save the Children

Children's Commissioner for Wales 2003, *Report and Accounts*

Funky Dragon 2002, *Annual Report* www.funkydragon.org

WAG 2000, *Extending Entitlement*. Welsh Assembly Government

WAG 2001, *Welsh Assembly Government Press Release 26th June 2001*
www.wales.gov.uk

Youth Work Curriculum Statement for Wales www.cwvys.org.uk

Youth Service Strategy For Wales www.cwvys.org.uk