



**Scotland's Commissioner  
for Children & Young People**

**Children and Young People's Participation in Scotland:  
Frameworks, standards and principles for practice**

**Summary Report**

**Dr Greg Mannion  
School of Education  
University of Stirling**

August 2012

**Citation for this summary report:** Mannion, G. (2012) *Children and Young People's Participation in Scotland: Frameworks, standards and principles for practice. Summary Report*. Edinburgh: Scotland's Commissioner for Children and Young People.

**The full report is available** from Scotland's Commissioner for Children and Young People at [www.sccyp.org.uk](http://www.sccyp.org.uk): Mannion, G. (2012) *Children and Young People's Participation in Scotland: Frameworks, standards and principles for practice*. Edinburgh: Scotland's Commissioner for Children and Young People.

## Children and Young People's Participation in Scotland: Frameworks, standards and principles for practice

---

### What was the research about?

Providing greater support for children and young people's participation in Scotland is seen by Scotland's Commissioner for Children and Young People as a way of addressing children's rights, improving practice across all kinds of services, and advancing a more democratic civil society. This research project tried to find out:

- Are there common elements in different standards, and principles for participation?
- How do selected frameworks suggest evaluating effectiveness and monitoring progress?
- What are the challenges and opportunities of using different frameworks?
- How do frameworks allow for the participation of children and young people?

*People [...] have perhaps maybe underestimated what a young person's perspective on something could be.*  
Adult respondent

### What is a framework of participation?

In all kinds of organisations (schools, local authorities, health boards, community groups etc), people are keen to make sure that children and young people (CYP) have a say in matters that affect them. In order to do this properly, many organisations use various frameworks, standards, principles and practices of participation to ensure professionals, parents, and others in the community work in a way that means CYP's rights are respected. Example statements from current frameworks include:

*Care and services are provided in partnership with patients, treating individuals with dignity and respect, and are responsive to age, disability, geographic location, gender, race, religion or belief, sexual orientation, socio-economic status.*

(A Participation Standard for the NHS in Scotland, Scottish Health Council, 2010)

*Children and young people will have direct contact with senior people who are in a position to make decisions and take action in relation to their ideas, views and experiences.*

('Ask First', Northern Ireland Standards for CYP's Participation in Public Decision Making, 2010)

## What did the research involve?

Some of the answers to the research questions were found by (a), comparing ten different frameworks of participation, and (b), interviewing ten adult informants with extensive experience in this area. In the interviews, the respondents were asked to comment on their experiences of choosing and using frameworks, the challenges or opportunities encountered, and the effects and outcomes. Ten frameworks (below), in current use in Scotland, the UK, and internationally, were analysed:

1	Framework of the MacRobert Arts Centre (Stirlingshire)	6	'Funky Dragon' (Welsh Assembly for CYP)
2	'Involved', (Scottish Borders Local Authority Area)	7	Scottish Health Council Framework
3	The National Theatre of Scotland model	8	Community Engagement Standard
4	'Ask First' (Northern Ireland)	9	Scottish Youth Parliament approach
5	'Hear by Right' standards and toolkit	10	International Monitoring & Evaluation of Participation Project (Oak Foundation)

## What were the findings?

1. There is evidence that frameworks of participation are playing a vital role in improving the realisation of CYP's rights in many fields including health, welfare, education, entertainment and leisure, as well as other local and national services and provisions. However, **CYP's participation needs to be further advanced and supported by frameworks across all contexts** including when:
  - a. CYP are the recipients of public services (for example, education or health)
  - b. CYP are indirectly the recipients of services or are affected by services (for example as members of families who receive local authority services)
  - c. CYP receive services as members of the general public (for example, as road users)
  - d. CYP or their families pay for services as private consumers (for example, when they go to the theatre or cinema), or when they participate in charitable organisations (for example, the guides, scouts or youth clubs)
2. The research identified the **overarching principles** and **operational practice** needed for a framework to work effectively (which may be expressed differently in a given context):

### Overarching Principles:

- equal opportunities for inclusive, voluntary participation
- respect for CYP's rights and differences
- transparency and accountability in decision making
- intergenerational power sharing
- relevance of content, purpose and outcome

**Operational Practice:**

- safe practice
- child-friendly approaches
- training and capacity building for adults and CYP
- involvement of CYP in relevant governance practices
- liaison and dialogue with relevant and influential adults
- internal and/or external monitoring and evaluation of progress
- involvement of CYP in monitoring and evaluation
- feedback mechanisms for the wider public

- 3. The research found that different frameworks of CYP's participation were influenced in practice by the culture, politics, and history of the organisations in which they are used.** For example, in youth work, the 'Hear by Right' framework was popular, whereas in Scotland's health services, statutory standards apply for all patient care. This means that frameworks in use are influenced by their context and employ different ways of working to make sense in their own communities. Because existing frameworks have widespread take up and tend to have long histories of support from particular organisations, it is unlikely that a single new national framework would be easily taken up across all contexts. Thus, **it would now be appropriate to provide a more coordinated national and international approach to the guidance and support of organisations about the purposes, principles, practices, and monitoring and evaluation procedures involved in devising and using frameworks of participation in local contexts.**
- 4.** In order to effectively guide and support CYP's participation in local contexts, the research suggests some **key questions** can usefully provide a starting point for a conversation designed to make explicit the role of a given framework in a particular organisation's context:
- a. What are the purposes of a given framework for CYP's participation? Are these the right purposes for this context? Do CYP have a say in deciding on purposes?
  - b. What principles and practices are found in the use of a given framework? Are these comprehensive enough? Do they reflect what is needed in this context?
  - c. What is the reach (geographical, population) of the practices the framework gives rise to? Is the reach sufficiently extensive or appropriately delimited?
  - d. What, if any, are the key theoretical, policy, or legal drivers behind the framework in use? What are the effects of these and are these effects appropriate?
  - e. How are CYP positioned in the framework? Do they have sufficient opportunities for dialogue with decision makers?
  - f. What approach to monitoring and evaluation (M&E) of effects and outcomes is taken? Are CYP involved in M&E work? Is M&E restricted to criteria set by adults? Is M&E used in a needs-based way or a rights-based way:

*The right to be heard is the fundamental human right. It's about your citizenship and your dignity. [...] It should not be contingent on evidence that it works or produces particular outcomes.*

Adult respondent

5. The research found that using frameworks of participation gave rise to some **generic tensions** that may need to be differently addressed in local contexts. Part of the work of guiding and supporting organisations in framework use would be to help them appropriately consider:

- a. Whether the framework seeks to advance participation for all ages (as in the case of health services) or to attend to younger age populations in particular
- b. Whether a framework works as a rhetorical tool to advocate for CYP's participation, or whether it is used in a more practical and developmental way with support mechanisms
- c. Whether the framework will operate and be monitored within a statutory context, be supported by charities or non-governmental organisations, or in corporate contexts
- d. Whether the overarching goal is ultimately to be child-led or to work towards some new form of intergenerational dialogical practice
- e. Whether the framework context requires bespoke structures and practices or needs to be easily adapted in a variety of contexts
- f. Whether the approach to M&E encourages feedback to CYP about progress (downward accountability), being answerable to others (upward accountability), or both.

6. The research found that when frameworks worked well they created:

- a. **times and places** for CYP to meet with each other and with adults
- b. **new roles** for professionals and other adults in private, voluntary and public services
- c. an acceptance that **CYP need to participate as citizens in their own right**
- d. (connected to a, b and c) **new relations** among children, their families, the wider adult public, politicians, policy makers, and service providers.

*Holding local and national politicians to account – requires a face-to-face encounter and structures for this.*

Adult respondent

*You can't hide if you've got a group of young people in front of you and they're asking you really direct question.*

Adult respondent

**Hence, CYP's participation forms a part of, and at the same time influences and changes the relations between adults and CYP in wider society as well as in CYP's organisations.** CYP's participation requires and feeds into wider intergenerational dialogue.

## Conclusion

The research found that it is unlikely that a new generic national framework would be taken up and used by organisations without substantial local adaptation. This is in part because existing frameworks are already in popular use in a variety of contexts, with some services being legally bound to employ specific frameworks or standards. While the research found frameworks tend to be products of their own time and place and need to be responsive to their contexts, there were some *common overarching principles and operational practices* that are likely to be important, as well some key *tensions and questions* related to CYP's participation that are worth considering at local level. These findings lend weight to the need for *a national approach to supporting those involved in framework design and use*. This could involve guiding organisations on the construction, ingredients, effects, use, and processes involved in devising and using frameworks of participation in local contexts.

In politics and policy, the research found frameworks in many contexts now ensure that CYP's participation is increasingly better supported but not fully widespread across all areas with the same emphases or practices. The respondents in this research, who have a lot of experience in using frameworks, showed that when CYP's participation is taken seriously, it is less of a checklist for organisations to attend to, and more of a journey towards deeper organizational and cultural change that requires *a radical shift in thinking and programming by all concerned*.

Part of this shift involves the creation of new places and times for key adults and CYP to meet, share ideas, and contribute to decision making. Another element involves CYP in monitoring and evaluating programmes against criteria that CYP can help decide; CYP's participation requires more than merely consulting CYP on outcomes decided by adults.

A key insight from this research, therefore, is that CYP's participation needs to be understood within the wider relations among adults and CYP: professionals, parents, the business community, voluntary groups, and civic bodies all need to change to further embed CYP's participation in organisational cultures, practices and ways of working. Seeing CYP's participation in this relational 'root and branch' manner means that effects will be felt not only by CYP themselves but also within professional practice and the wider community. Solely making professionals comply with a requirement to consult with CYP on adult-led issues may be necessary, but will be insufficient for stretching professionals into taking on a children's rights agenda, and changing adults' roles, practices and relations with CYP.

Seeing CYP's participation as a part of a wider intergenerational, democratic process, where CYP are citizens too, is therefore a key insight for considering the effective contextual use of frameworks of participation and a worthy way for considering effects.



**Scotland's Commissioner  
for Children & Young People**

**Scotland's Commissioner for Children and Young People**

**85 Holyrood Road**

**Edinburgh**

**EH8 8AU**

**Tel: 0131 558 3733**

**Young People's Freephone: 0800 019 1179**

**Fax: 0131 556 3733**

**Web: [www.sccyp.org.uk](http://www.sccyp.org.uk)**

**Twitter: [@RightsSCCYP](https://twitter.com/RightsSCCYP)**

**[www.sccyp.org.uk](http://www.sccyp.org.uk)**