Children and Young People's Participation in Wales

Research

Children and Young People's Participation in Wales

Audience　　Schools, local authorities, national, local and voluntary organisations concerned with children and young people's policy and provision, families and the community.

Overview　　The aim of this study was to provide an overview of the evidence (both in the UK and internationally) of the benefits of children and young people's involvement in decision making in schools, local authorities and organisations.

Action　　None – for information.
required

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Additional　　This document can also be accessed from the Welsh Assembly
copies　　Government website at: www.wales.gov.uk/educationandskills

Related　　None
documents

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CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S PARTICIPATION IN WALES

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

This is a summary of a report that York Consulting did for the Welsh Assembly Government looking at the benefits of involving children and young people in participation and decision making. Participation can mean different things to different people but the definition we used, which young people helped develop is:

> "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".

First of all we looked at what had been written about the benefits of involving children and young people in participation and decision making. We reviewed 30 pieces of literature, mainly from the UK. We also visited schools and youth forums in eight local authorities across Wales and spoke to:-

- children and young people involved in decision making, as well as those who weren't involved;
- headteachers and youth forum coordinators; and
- school staff and youth forum staff.

What activities were children and young people involved in?

The children and young people we spoke to were involved in a wide range of decision making and participatory activities. This included: strategic decision making; staff recruitment and training; deciding what pupils learn and how lessons are taught in school.

The report shows the approaches used to make sure that young people from a wide range of backgrounds were included in decision making. In the examples we studied it also shows that some groups, e.g. Gypsy Travellers, black and minority ethnic children and young people, asylum seekers and refugees, young mothers and young carers, were not as involved as they could be.

Not all the activities were as inclusive as they might have been. Older young people (over 18) were not involved in some youth forums and younger children (7 and under) in some primary schools were not included as much as they might have been. Sometimes opportunities to be involved in decision making were lost when pupils transferred from primary to secondary school.

The benefits of participation

The literature we reviewed and the visits we made showed that children and young people got a lot out of being involved in decision making, as did the organisations and staff involved. Fewer benefits were identified for parents and communities.

How did children and young people benefit from being involved in participation and decision-making? Our discussions and the literature we reviewed, showed that they learnt new skills, such as presentation and work-related skills, and how to speak on behalf of others. They also learnt how to get on better with adults and other children and young people; and made new friends. Some children and young people's behaviour and progress in learning (at school) also improved, although teachers said it was difficult to make a direct link between the these improvements and young people's involvement in decision making and participation activities. These views were supported by the literature we reviewed.

What did organisations and staff get out of children and young people being involved in decision making? Both the literature and our discussions showed that organisations changed how they worked with children and young people and provided services and facilities for them. Staff also felt that they got on better with children and young people and understood more about their needs.

What difference does it make?

Very few settings looked at the difference made (impact) of involving children and young people in decision making and participatory activities. There was also limited evidence of this in the literature. School staff had mixed views about whether they should be measuring impact.

Some young people and staff we spoke to felt that children and young people did not receive enough information (feedback) about what had changed as a result of their involvement in decision making. Sometimes the information they received was of a poor quality.

Challenges and barriers to participation

The main things that got in the way of children and young people being involved in decision making were:-

- having enough time and money to pay for things, like transport, so that they could get involved;
- staff who thought that children and young people should not be involved in decision making or only involved in decisions about less important things;
- staff sometimes found it difficult to make sure that as many different groups of children and young people as possible were involved;
- some young people had poor experiences of participation, which put them off being involved in other decision making activities.

Good practice identified

Some good approaches used in the settings visited, included: having clear aims and objectives so that everyone understands what participation in decision making means; why it's good to do; how it can be done; and what the outcomes and benefits will be. This encourages people to value participatory activities and take ownership of them. This approach also helps schools and organisations to identify the differences that participation can make. Involving children and young people in decision making at all levels, on real issues, such as what is taught at school, was another good approach used in the settings visited.

Making sure that children and young people receive feedback e.g. what has changed as a result of their involvement; that schools and organisations look at the difference participation makes to those involved; and providing enough time and money for it to be successful, are all important to a good approach. Training is also important, so that people have the right skills to be able to participate.

Conclusions

The children and young people we spoke to were involved in a wide range of decision making and participatory activities in schools and local authorities. Children and young people also said that getting involved in one thing, such as the school council, helped them get involved in other participatory activities, such as the youth forum. It also helped them develop a wide range of skills.

Participatory activities gave children, young people and staff the chance to learn more about one another and to do this in different settings. This helped to shift the 'balance of power' in relationships between young people and adults, whether this was between school staff and pupils; councillors and youth forum members; or support staff and young disabled people. Participation provided opportunities to change attitudes, develop new skills and relationships which were more equal.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are for staff in schools, organisations and local authorities, as well as national policy makers:-

1. The good practice in this research needs to be shared with as many people as possible.

2. This research found some examples of impact linked to participation, but there needs to be more hard evidence of positive outcomes. By hard evidence we mean things like improvements in behaviour and progress in learning at school. In the settings we visited, children and young people were involved in participation but there was little recording or linking these activities to positive outcomes. To be successful the benefits of participation need to be clear and schools and other organisations need to know what progress they have made, what things are working well and what things are working not so well.

3. Schools and organisations need to consider whether their participatory activities include as broad a range of children and young people as possible and make sure they get those involved who are not currently represented.

4. The research showed how important it is that staff are able to see the benefits of participation. It also showed the importance of staff training so that they have the right skills to involve children and young people in participation. Informing staff of the benefits of participation and the positive outcomes should help make staff more supportive.

5. Some links need to be improved. Strengthening the links between schools and youth forums would mean that learning from both could be used to develop stronger participatory approaches across local authorities. Strengthening links between primary and secondary schools will ensure that the benefits continue and skills aren't lost.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1   This is the second report from a study undertaken by York Consulting LLP (YCL) for the Welsh Assembly Government entitled, 'Children and Young People's Participation in Wales'. The research was conducted between January and June 2008.

1.2   The first report, by way of a Rapid Evidence Assessment (REA), provided an overview of the literature, focusing on the benefits associated with children and young people's participation.

1.3   This report presents findings from the second phase of the study focusing on case-study work of participatory practice in LAs across Wales, and, where appropriate, it also presents findings from the REA.

Background to the Study

1.4   The Welsh Assembly Government's vision for children and young people is embedded within three key documents:-

- **Children and Young People: A Framework for Partnership**.
- **Extending Entitlement: supporting young people in Wales.**
- **Children and Young People: Rights to Action.**

1.5   'Better Wales', the strategic plan of the Welsh Assembly made a commitment to treating children and young people as *'valued members of the community whose voices are heard and needs considered across the range of policy making'*. The framework recognised the importance of listening more closely to the views of children and young people and ensuring they are able to take an active part in decision making and determining the services they receive.

1.6   The framework outlined three main elements for successful participation; **context, structure and support,** and emphasised the need to ensure the views of children and young people are incorporated into the policies and plans of service providers, and that consultation is meaningful and interactive to promote inclusivity

1.7   'Extending Entitlement', launched in 2000, is the Welsh Assembly Government's strategy for promoting opportunity and choice for all young people in Wales aged 11-25 years With the key objectives of strengthening policy and practice through an improved focus on: achievement; young people's capacity for independence in the democratic process; quality and responsiveness of services; participation of young people; and more effective co-ordination and partnership at a local level.

1.8   Extending Entitlement outlined that every young person in Wales had the basic entitlement to be consulted and to participate in decision making.

1.9   The Welsh Assembly Government has adopted the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child as the basis for all work with children and young people in Wales. 'Children and Young People: Rights to Action' sets out the Government's seven core aims underpinning services for children and young people, which are based on the Convention Rights.

1.10   One of the core aims of Rights to Action was that all children and young people 'are listened to, treated with respect, and have their race and cultural identity recognised'.

1.11   These three documents are based on a number of core themes:-

- a foundation of principle in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child; (Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, sets out the right of all children and young people to express an opinion and to have that opinion taken into account in any matter or procedure which affects them);

- entitlements to services based on the needs of the child or young person;

- listening to and acting on the views of children, young people and families;

- giving the highest priority to those most in need; and

- a commitment to partnership working between different local organisations as the key way in which these aspirations can be achieved.

1.12   The focus on listening to and acting on young people's views has been taken forward through a number of national and local structures, including: Funky Dragon; the Participation Consortium; the Participation Unit; the Participation Project; School Councils; and Youth forums.

1.13   The Participation Unit and Consortium have also developed a set of National Participation Standards for organisations to measure and assess their participatory practice.

1.14   These are based on seven core standards, entitled as follows:-

- information;
- it's your choice;
- no discrimination;
- respect;
- you get something out of it;
- feedback; and
- improving how we work.

Defining Participation

1.15   Participation can have a wide range of definitions and mean different things to different people. Given the focus of this report, it might prove helpful to provide a definition here. A shared understanding of children and young people's participation has been developed by the Children and Young People's Consortium for Wales[1] and a national definition has been agreed with the involvement of young people:

> *'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'.*

Aims and Objectives

1.16   The overall aim of this study was to provide an overview of the evidence (both from the UK and internationally) of the benefits of children and young people's involvement in decision making. Benefits might be for: children and young people themselves, schools, families, the community and, organisations and agencies working with children and young people.

1.17   Commensurate with the above aim, the study had the following research objectives, to:-

- identify children and young people's current involvement in decision-making at the school and community level;

- explore the range of positive outcomes which can result from participation in decision making for those involved, for example improved self-esteem, improvements in behaviour;

- identify wider outcomes, for example for the schools involved, in terms of better behaviour, an improved school environment, better attendance;

- identify good practice in participatory approaches for the organisations involved;

- explore how inclusive and representative participatory approaches and mechanisms, such as school councils and youth forums are; and

- explore the main barriers to increasing participation in schools and the community.

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[1] Children and Young People's Consortium for Wales, Participation: A Discussion Paper 2004.

Methods

1.18   A total of 30 sources of literature were identified for inclusion in the REA. The criteria for their inclusion were that they:-

- were published from 2000 onwards;
- were from the UK (where relevant international studies were also included);
- focused on children and young people's involvement in decision making;
- focused on good practice; and
- provided outcomes-related evidence.

1.19   Case studies were identified via consultations with national stakeholders during the initial stages of the research and via LA participation coordinators. The case studies were selected:-

- because they had embedded or developing participatory practice;
- to reflect a geographical spread across Wales;
- to reflect a mixture of urban and rural locations; and
- to include a range of primary and secondary schools and community locations.

1.20   For the case-study work, a total of 16 settings (primary and secondary schools and community based youth forums/networks) were visited in eight LAs across Wales. Visits were undertaken in:-

- five primary schools;
- five secondary schools (including one special school with pupils aged 7-19); and
- six community based youth forums/networks.

1.21   Given that we visited a relatively small number of settings that had embedded or developing participatory practice, these findings cannot be seen to be representative of all schools and community based youth forums and networks across Wales. However, they do provide useful insights into the benefits, barriers and challenges (and ways these might be overcome), associated with implementing participatory activities and highlights some of the good practice being undertaken.

1.22   Within each setting a range of children, young people and staff were spoken to. In schools, this included:-

- the headteacher or member of SMT;
- staff members responsible for participatory activities within the school, for example, school council, eco council;

- children and young people involved in participatory activities; and

- children and young people not involved in participatory activities.

1.23   At the youth forum/community level similar stakeholders were consulted i.e. youth forum coordinators, staff involved in delivering participatory activities and young people involved in participatory activities.

1.24   It was initially envisaged that we would identify a primary and secondary school and youth focused intervention within each LA. This was not possible, so the number of LAs visited had to be increased to ensure sufficient numbers of primary and secondary schools and youth forums were represented. The aim was to identify settings that had embedded or were developing participatory approaches. It had been hoped to identify settings that were able to demonstrate clear evidence of impact and methods for evaluating participatory activity, but the latter aim proved particularly challenging.

Structure of the Report

1.25   The remainder of the report is divided into five sections:-

- **Section 2** provides an overview of the participatory activities children and young people were involved in, staff and children and young people's motivation for involvement, recruitment processes and a discussion of how representative the participatory approaches were.

- **Section 3** highlights the benefits of participation for children and young people, the organisations and staff involved, and communities and parents. It also provides an overview of feedback mechanisms and strategies used by staff to measure the impact of participation.

- **Section 4** explores the key barriers and challenges to participation identified by staff and children and young people.

- **Section 5** provides an overview of the good practice identified, lessons learnt and areas for development.

- **Section 6** presents our conclusions and recommendations.

2. OVERVIEW OF PARTICPATION ACTIVITIES

> **Key Findings: Overview of Participatory Activities**
>
> **What activities were children and young people involved in?**
>
> - Children and young people were involved in a broad range of participatory activities at both the school and LA level, including:-
>
>   – improving facilities within schools and LAs;
>
>   – staff recruitment and training;
>
>   – curriculum design;
>
>   – strategic decision making;
>
>   – behaviour management (in schools); and
>
>   – promoting and raising awareness of young people's rights.
>
> - Three of the five secondary schools in the study had appointed associate pupil governors and two of the ten schools in the study had participation policies.
>
> **Motivation for involvement in participatory activities:**
>
> - Most of the organisations and staff were motivated to engage children and young people because of their belief in:-
>
>   – democratic and egalitarian principles;
>
>   – the rights (and responsibilities) of children and young people;
>
>   – the importance of ensuring their involvement in decision making.
>
> - Children and young people were engaged in participatory activities for a number of reasons, including:-
>
>   – wanting to make a difference;
>
>   – ensuring services better meet their needs;
>
>   – getting their voices heard;
>
>   – changing the image of young people within their community.
>
> **Recruitment processes:**
>
> - Most children and young people became involved in participatory activities via professionals who worked with them, or via membership of existing groups.
>
> **Strategies to ensure representation:**
>
> - Organisations sought to make participatory activities representative through a number of methods, such as: providing a range of participation activities and communication mechanisms; ensuring that all age ranges were represented (at the school level); and widening the participation framework.

Participatory Activity

2.1   The children and young people we consulted were involved in a wide range of activities at a school, LA, national and international level.

In-School Participation

2.2   At the school level, pupils were most likely to be involved in participatory activity and decision-making that focused on the **school environment and facilities**. This included:-

- decision-making related to the provision of outdoor play equipment, for example, canvassing other pupils' opinions about what to buy, planning where it will go in the school grounds etc;

- developing an outdoor classroom (see example below);

- provision of facilities, such as water coolers;

- improvements/changes to facilities such as toilets, uniforms, school dinners, improving pathways in the school grounds;

- raising money for facilities (for example, money raised by enterprise activities used to pay for improved facilities);

- pupils running the school library and delivering training for other pupils to take on the role.

Developing an outdoor classroom

Pupils were involved in a wide range of activities including:-

- design and modification of the classroom to fit the budget;

- obtaining quotes for the building work;

- assessing viability of quotes/proposals received;

- fund raising and budget management: deciding the best design for the funds available;

- canvassing pupil opinion of the design and facilities provided; and

- obtaining planning permission.

2.3   There were some examples of pupil involvement in curricular development, staff recruitment, and behaviour management:-

- **curriculum development:** at the school council level, there was evidence of pupils' involvement in curriculum development, or at least pupils' views on the curriculum being sought in two of the primary schools and two of the secondary schools visited (examples are provided in **Figure 2.1**);

- **staff recruitment:** albeit in isolated examples there was evidence of this occurring in two of the schools in the study (one primary and one secondary). In the secondary school, the pupils' role in interviewing staff was seen as a '*very important part of the recruitment process*' (headteacher). As part of the recruitment process, prospective teachers were also asked to run taught classes and pupils were asked to provide feedback on this; and

- **behaviour management**: pupils were involved in implementing behaviour management strategies at both the primary and secondary level. These included acting as peer mediators to address behavioural issues and bullying, and to monitor playground activities. One of the secondary schools had also developed a sexual health programme run by, and for, pupils.

Figure 2.1: Examples of Participatory Activities in School
Curriculum Development

- School council members in one primary school had sought other pupils' views on the curriculum. As a result of this, more interactive schemes of work were introduced in maths. School council members will also be responsible for gathering the views of Foundation Stage pupils about the activities within the Foundation Stage curriculum.

- After consulting with the whole student body, one of the case-study secondary schools revised its curriculum to include additional vocational modules: '[A] *strong message came through from the pupils that they needed more vocational subjects*' (headteacher).

- Year 5 and Year 6 pupils in one primary school delivered classroom lessons as part of their work experience, writing lesson plans, teaching the class and reviewing the lesson afterwards.

Figure 2.1: Examples of Participatory Activities in School
Behaviour Management

Peer Mediation Programme

In one of the primary schools, Year 5 and 6 pupils were engaged in a peer mediation programme. Pupils addressed issues and problems that arose during school break times and in the reduction of instances of bullying. Pupils were involved via pupil nomination and discussion with teachers, followed by training and shadowing on mediation skills. The school also operated a 'friendship stop'[2] in the playground.

PALS Project

The 'Pupils Always Listening Service' (PALS), which operated in one secondary school, was made up of ten volunteer pupils from Year 9 who provided support to other pupils, mainly those in Year 7. The initiative aimed to reduce instances of bullying and to help Year 7 pupils settle in their new school environment. The pupils involved in the PALS project were each allocated a form within Year 7 to look after. PALS pupils received training from Childline: *'They come into the school and teach us how to deal with different situations like bullying or name calling'* and '*if we come across problems we report them to the Head of Year'* (pupil). Estyn noted that 's*pecially trained pupils from Year 9 are on hand to deal with problems highlighted by younger pupils, and there are clear guidelines displayed throughout the school regarding the nature of bullying and action pupils' experiencing any form of bullying should take'.*

2.4   Pupils were involved in policy design, school governance, prioritising aims and objectives and environmental activities:-

- **policy design:** school council members from two of the secondary schools were involved in developing the school's improvement plan and pupils from the special school had been involved in designing the school's participation policy (see Figure 2.2). Only two of the schools provided evidence of having a participation policy. Even within these schools it was acknowledged that the information quickly became out of date because of the speed at which developments were made;

- **school governance and prioritisation of aims and objectives:** three of the secondary schools had appointed associate pupil governors (see Figure 2.2). Pupils from one of the primary schools used a 'diamond prioritisation system' to prioritise the activities of its school council: '*We do diamond ranking and this gives you a clear answer on what everyone wants'* (primary pupil). School council members were also involved in establishing ground rules and behavioural codes for the conduct of meetings;

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[2] A friendship stop is a place in the playground where children can go if they are feeling lonely or upset and would like someone to play with.

- **environmental activities:** primary pupils were involved in a wide range of environmental activities. There was less evidence of these activities at the secondary level (see **Figure 2.2**).

Figure 2.2: Examples of Participatory Activities in School
Policy Design
School Participation Policy (February 2007). Both staff and pupils were involved in its development. The policy provides details of:-   • the overall principles of participation;   • policy context;   • key principles e.g. entitlement, empowerment, equal opportunities, raising attainment, protection, democracy and respect;   • map of the school forum and satellite forums supporting pupil voice and pupil participation and community action e.g. Eco School Council, UNICEF Rights Respecting School, and Millennium Eco Centre Forum; and   • the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.
School Governance
Staff in one of the secondary schools that had appointed associate pupil governors noted that: '*the input of pupils with the governors has been very positive*'. Pupils said that it was '*good that they* [pupils] *know what's going on'* (non-participating pupil). In the other two schools (which included the special school[3]), school council representatives did meet regularly with governors and, where relevant, attended governors' meetings. At the special school, 'governor mentors', also attended school council meetings.
Environmental Activities
Pupils were involved in a wide range of environmental activities which included: waste recycling (for the school and the local community); enhancing the school environment via waste management and tree planting; research and analysis e.g. analysing the levels of litter produced, staff journeys to work, and analysis of schools' energy consumption; energy saving monitors; a walking bus; the development of eco promises and an eco code, environmentally focused activity days e.g. 'Green Days'; and fair trade related activities (including the establishment of a fair trade shop and writing a play focused on fair trade issues).

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[3] Under The School Councils (Wales) Regulations 2005 there is no requirement for special schools to appoint associate pupil governors.

Community and LA-Wide Participation

2.5   The primary vehicles for this work in the settings visited were:-

- community groups and local youth forums (community level);
- special interest groups which all had a focus on young disabled people (LA level);
- LA youth forums/Councils;
- National networks (such as the Young Disabled Person's Network and Funky Dragon) and;
- schools (community, LA and national level).

2.6   Children and young people were involved in promoting young people's rights; establishing/membership of decision-making forums; policy and service design and inspection; staff recruitment and training; and local community and enterprise based work:-

- **promoting and raising awareness of young people's rights** amongst agencies and services working with, or providing services for, young people, for example GPs and elected members. Young people (from schools and youth forums) had been involved in a range of consultation exercises (both locally and nationally), presenting at, and running conferences, and campaigning about local issues;

- **consultation on, and design of, policies and services**: young people's involvement in LA, voluntary and statutory policy and service design was another important area of input, for example ensuring that Single Plans were 'young person' friendly, establishing a Youth Parliament and membership of strategic management groups within local councils. Inspecting the services provided by LAs and other organisations appeared to be a growing area of involvement for youth forum and network members;

- **staff recruitment and training:** young people were involved in staff recruitment for voluntary organisations, LA level staff and participation-based networks/forums (both locally and nationally). They were also involved in providing training for elected members and professionals in how to work with children and young people. One LA had used the National Participation Standards for Children and Young People to raise chief officers' awareness of the standards and what they intended to do to meet those standards (see Figure 2.3); and

- **community and enterprise work:** these types of activities were particularly prominent in the special school visited. Staff noted that pupils were involved in a wide range of community projects and enterprise activities, which provided them with experience of '*real hands-on decision making*'.

Figure 2.3: Examples of Participatory Activities in Communities/LAs
Promoting and Raising Awareness of Young People's Rights

The health sub-committee of one Youth Forum was designing posters to promote young people's rights with local GPs. The committee wanted to raise GPs' awareness of how to communicate more effectively with young people because issues had been raised that young people felt they were often 'spoken down to'.

Young people from the Young Disabled Person's Network were involved in a range of consultation exercises at a national level, focusing on promoting and raising awareness of young disabled people's rights, including:-

- Members of the Equality of Opportunity Steering Group for Disabled Young People (Welsh Assembly Government), which resulted in the publication of the report: '*Service Provision for Disabled Young People: 'Why is it that disabled young people are always left until last*?'' (2007).

- Members of the Transitions Working Group focusing on improving transitions for young disabled people. A number of the young people had presented at a national Transitions Conference which was a direct result of young people's frustration at their lack of involvement in their own transitions.

- 'Young Voices Diversity in Education Conference' (Lisbon) talking about their experiences of college, school, FE and HE.

- Organising a Careers Conference to be held in December 2008. This again was a direct result of young people's frustration with the careers advice and support they had received. Young people from the network will run workshops and are members of the conference steering group.

- Play and Leisure Consultation. As a result of this consultation exercise funding was provided for play and leisure activities for disabled children and young people across Wales.

- Members of the network were also involved in the Disabled Children Matters Wales Forum.

Youth forum members were involved in activities to raise elected members' awareness of 'good practice' in working with young people. For example, in one LA the youth forum had produced a 'mosaic' for elected members to show them what a perfect councillor might look like. A number of the youth forums were involved in a national campaign called '*I'm a councillor get me out of here*' to elect a 'young person's champion' within the council.

Policy/Service Design, Consultation and Inspection

Establishing a youth parliament: a total of 40 young people form the Youth Parliament Steering Group and members also co-chaired the Youth Parliament 'Task and Finish' group (CYPP work in this LA is delivered by a network of task and finish groups which address specific issues).

Figure 2.3: Examples of Participatory Activities in Communities/LAs

In one LA, youth forum members' co-chaired strategic management groups (see section on good practice for further details) and sat on steering groups of organisations delivering services to young people.

Two youth forum members described how they had been involved in the development of their LA's Single Plan, changing it from a '*huge, unwieldy document that no one could understand*'' to a young person-friendly document that all young people (including disabled young people) could access and that was more appropriate to meeting the needs of young people within the LA. The youth forum consulted with young people in the community to gather their views on how the document could be made more accessible and also produced a DVD detailing the main aspects of the plan.

In one LA, youth forum members had designed a new complaints leaflet for the Children and Family Court Advisory Support Service (CAFCASS) making it 'young people friendly', whilst in another LA they were involved in developing the council's complaints procedures.

In a number of LAs young people were responsible for inspecting services (voluntary, statutory and private sector) to ensure that they met their needs and had genuine participatory approaches. Those organisations that were able to demonstrate such an approach received a kite mark to show that they had met the required standards of the inspectors. Within one LA, young people (including a young disabled person) were responsible for inspecting and assessing service provision. The young people were paid to evaluate a range of services, including hospitals, libraries, dentists, charities and other organisations. The focus was on making services user friendly for young people in the LA and those who were successful received a kite mark to this effect. Organisations were assessed on an annual basis

Staff Recruitment and Training

In one LA, young people were involved in staff recruitment for a local advocacy programme. All (adult) advocates are interviewed by young people involved in developing the programme. The programme covers a wide range of issues including: bullying, exclusion from services and family problems and can be accessed by young people whenever they feel they need support. Advocates support young people in accessing a range of services, for example health, housing, CAFCASS, or if they want to make a complaint about a service they have received.

In one LA, youth forum members led CYPP training on the National Participation Standards for Children and Young People for all the chief officers in the LA. They delivered a presentation on each of the Participation Standards e.g. 'information', 'respect' etc. and explained to chief officers what this meant. The Chief Participation and Inclusion Officer then asked the officers what they would do to meet the Standards.

Figure 2.3: Examples of Participatory Activities in Communities/LAs
In another LA, youth forum members had designed and delivered training to elected members on young people's issues. This training was complemented by young people making a presentation to the Cabinet to help raise awareness in local government of young people's issues and concerns.
Community and Enterprise Work
In one school, activities included: a café, a fair trade shop, a car valeting service, and a hair and beauty salon, all of which were based at the school and open to the public. Pupils at the school were also part of an environmental task force which provided recycling and gardening facilities in the community. The school grounds included a number of gardens, including a 'faith garden', designed and built by pupils, which were open to the community and had been identified as a national example of excellence and used as a model of good practice by Liverpool Cathedral.

Motivation for Involvement

2.7   The literature identified a number of key 'drivers' (Whitty and Wisby, 2007; Cleaver and Kerr, 2006) for involving children and young people in participation, including: promoting children and young people's rights; strengthening citizenship and democratic processes; school/organisations and community improvement; and participation as a vehicle for children and young people to bring about effective change in their lives.

2.8   Identifying the reasons why consultees become involved in participation can provide useful insights for the development of recruitment procedures and encourage the engagement and buy-in of staff, children and young people.

Organisations and Staff

2.9   Organisational and staff motivation for participation focused on a belief in:-

- democratic and egalitarian principles;
- the rights (and responsibilities) of children and young people; and
- the importance of ensuring their involvement in decision making

2.10   A number of the schools had been involved in developing these types of approaches for a considerable length of time (i.e. more than five years) because they could see the benefits. Participatory approaches were embedded within these schools long before the requirements for school councils came in. The reasons for involvement, given by both school and youth forum staff, included a firm belief in **democratic and egalitarian principles** and the rights (and responsibilities) of children and young people. This reflected a view held by consultees that the active involvement of children and young people could benefit both the individuals and the organisations involved. Without staff holding such beliefs, participation is unlikely to be successful and is in danger of becoming a 'tokenistic' exercise.

2.11   There was a clear desire to **promote children and young people's rights** and get them **involved in decision making** at a local and national level. The focus on promoting children and young people's rights was most apparent at the youth forum/community network level. However, there were also some notable examples at the school level, including one school that had achieved UNICEF's 'Rights Respecting School[4] Award'.

2.12   Staff motivation for involvement also focused on a desire to ensure that children and young people's voices were heard. They wanted children and young people to identify with school, community and national issues and have 'their say' on these issues. In so doing, it was felt that children and young people took responsibility for the decisions made, leading to a greater sense of 'ownership', belonging and investment in their school and/or community.

2.13   External pressures and demands (both nationally and locally) to consult with children and young people were also recognised as a key influence on the development of participatory practices within youth forums. For example, a youth worker commented: '*everyone is asking have you consulted with young people*?'

Figure 2.4: Staff And Organisations' Motivation For Involvement
Democratic and Egalitarian Principles
One primary headteacher noted that the school had been involved in participation activities for 15 years and the school council had been in existence for 13 years. The headteacher reflected that participation, and in particular, the school council *'is very much part of school decision making processes'.*
Promoting Young People's Rights And Involvement In Decision Making
'[Name of young disabled support group] *is a specific 'Children's Voice' service that works with, and for, disabled young people … It aims to be a springboard that will enable disabled young people to access mainstream generic and specialist services by:* • *giving information;* • *developing skills;* • *facilitating various means to have their opinions and ideas based on their own experiences and that of the group, to feed into the decision making processes that exist locally*'. It '*wants young people to know their rights and feel free to speak out about any injustices they may experience and be supported to take any appropriate action they wish to pursue*'.

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[4] See http://rrsa.unicef.org.uk/ for further details.

Children and Young People

2.14   Children and young people's motivation for involvement centred on a desire to:-

- make a difference;
- ensure services better meet their needs;
- get their voices heard; and
- change the image of young people within their community.

2.15   Staff and young people agreed on these four main reasons for young people's involvement.

2.16   Most children and young people consulted said that they became involved because they wanted to **make a difference** and change practice in their school, community and/or nationally. Young people were also motivated to get involved because they wanted to ensure that **services better met their needs** and to improve facilities within their school, community or LA.

2.17   Children and young people got involved because they wanted to:-

- **get their voices heard**, to ensure that decisions that affected them were not made without their involvement and were not dominated by adults and professionals. This was a particular motivating factor for the young disabled people spoken to; they wanted to influence decision making and policy affecting young disabled people's rights at both a local and national level;

- **change their image within the local community**. This was a particular motivating factor for young people at the youth forum/community level.

Figure 2.5: Children And Young People's Motivation For Involvement
To Make A Difference
'I wanted to join [the school council] *because I wanted to make a difference to the school'.*
'I wanted to be on it [eco council] *to help the environment'.*
'I wanted to be on it [school council] *to look after the school and the outside of the school. We've planted lots of trees and got lots of parents involved'.*
'*I wanted to be involved to make a difference to the community, I feel I can make a difference it makes me feel happy'.*
Ensure Services Better Meet Their Needs
'*There's nothing for young people to do, so I want to change that*'.
Get Their Voice Heard
'[It's all about getting my] *voice heard. If you don't make your voice heard nothing is going to happen'.*

Figure 2.5: Children And Young People's Motivation For Involvement
Change the Image of Young People in the Community
'I wanted to change the public's view of young people, especially what older people think … They think we're all yobs … It's about changing the image of young people'.

Recruitment Processes

2.18   Generally, children and young people became involved in participatory activities via the professionals who worked with them. The idea to become involved was presented by school staff, youth workers, or social workers, not by the young people themselves. Thus, professionals were key gatekeepers and facilitators to children and young people's engagement in participatory activities. Those young people involved in youth forums tended to be recruited via existing groups, for example youth clubs or community groups. Youth forum staff noted how important these groups were in recruiting their members (see Figure 2.6).

2.19   A number of clear examples were provided where young people's involvement in one group (e.g. a local community/interest group or school council) was cited as a springboard to their involvement at the LA level (e.g. Youth Forum), which led to their involvement in participation at a national level (e.g. Funky Dragon and the Young Disabled Persons' Network). This highlights the clear progression opportunities linked to involving children and young people in participation at the local level.

Figure 2.6: Recruitment Processes
How Young People Got Involved
'The hard work comes from the voluntary sector groups. Our strength as a county lies within the voluntary sector groups like the Community First areas. Them knowing the agenda, the importance [of participation]. *They are the ones who get the young people to attend. They are a massive support network* (youth forum co-ordinator)'.

2.20   A mix of recruitment processes were used across the different types of participatory activity:-

- voluntary inclusion/involvement asking for volunteers/nominees (peer mediation, Eco Councils, national networks and forums, healthy schools, youth forums);
- democratic selection, i.e. children and young people voted-on/elected to their posts (school councils, Funky Dragon, youth forums).

Recruitment at the School Level

2.21   In terms of establishing a school council and recruiting members, school staff noted the importance of giving children and young people ownership of the process from the beginning.

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Setting up a school council

When initially setting up the school council in her school a primary headteacher said that she spoke to pupils about what a school council was, she got their views on whether they would like one (this was before requirements for school councils came in), what it should look like and how to take it forward.

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2.22   There were notable differences in the numbers and ages of young people involved in school councils, particularly at the primary level (this is discussed in further detail in the next section).

2.23   There was less 'active promotion' of involvement in participatory activities at the school level than at the youth forum level. This perhaps reflects the fact that pupils in school are more of a 'captive audience' and therefore recruitment processes did not have to be as overt. The issue here is whether schools are actively recruiting from a broad enough range of pupils. School staff did provide examples of promoting and raising awareness of school councils amongst pupils, for example, running sessions on 'what school councils are' and 'what they do'. Other participatory activities, such as 'Eco Schools', were promoted via PSE lessons and linked into environmental interests that pupils might have outside of school.

Recruitment at the Community Level

2.24   In order to recruit young people, youth forums had to promote their participatory activities more actively than schools. The range of methods they used included:-

- running open evenings and other activities in the community to try and engage as many young people as possible;

- mobile youth provision going out into the community (particularly in rural areas) providing a range of activities and resources, as well as promoting the work of the youth forum. In one LA this was done in partnership with the play team;

- working with local community groups, youth clubs, and youth workers working in the community;

- using existing successful projects e.g. community based, young person led radio station to generate wider motivation and engagement of other young people in participatory activities; and

- websites and newsletters to promote the work of the youth forum; although how successful these would be at recruiting young people to participatory activities, without face-to-face contact, is questionable.

2.25   Young people on the youth forums were either volunteers or voted into their posts, depending on demand. Where elections occurred staff felt that it was important that, where possible, they mirrored adult election processes.

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Election Processes

A youth forum coordinator explained how young people were elected on to the youth council. '*They get trained and get involved. There are elections every year within the forum'.* The council follows full election processes – booths, verification etc. '*It gives them* [young people] *an understanding of what to expect of democracy'.*

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Figure 2.7 provides some examples of how young people became youth forum members.

Figure 2.7: Youth Forum Recruitment
How Young People Got Involved
Young person 1: via their youth club. This young person was running the tuck shop at her youth club and her youth worker suggested that it would be a good idea for her to join the youth forum. She attended an open evening and joined from there. **Young person 2**: got involved through his involvement with Funky Dragon. As part of this role he met with members of the youth forum and was invited to join. **Young person 3**: got involved via a youth worker at her local community forum who linked her in to Funky Dragon. From her involvement in Funky Dragon she got involved in the LA youth forum. **Young person 4**: her youth worker from her school suggested she attend a youth forum open evening and she got involved via that: '*she said I had a big mouth and could make a difference and I've really enjoyed it'.*

Strategies to Ensure Representation

2.27   Previous research (Ireland et al., 2006; Molloy et al., 2002) has shown that ensuring that participatory approaches are representative of all children and young people is challenging. Our research confirms these previous findings, but also highlights a number of strategies that youth forums and schools were using to ensure that their participatory approaches were as representative as possible.

How do Schools/Youth Forums Ensure They are Representative?

2.28   Schools and youth forums ensured they were representative by:-

- providing a range of activities and communication mechanisms;
- ensuring all year groups were represented (at the school level);

- widening the participation framework (at the youth forum level) and increasing the accessibility of LA and school based forums;

- linking into existing participatory groups and activities; and

- targeting under-represented young people and gap analysis.

2.29 **Providing a range of activities and communication mechanisms**: some of the schools we consulted sought to make participatory activities as representative as possible through activities designed to appeal to as wide a range of interests as possible. This approach was particularly evident in the primary schools and special school, but was less evident at the secondary level. It was more challenging at the secondary level, and for youth forums, because of curriculum demands and because they were working on a much larger scale. Providing a range of communication mechanisms to allow children and young people to express their views also helped ensure that participatory approaches were as representative as possible.

2.30 School settings also increased representation by **ensuring that all year groups were represented** in participatory activities.

2.31 **Widening the participation framework and increasing the accessibility of LA and school based forums:** for example, the creation of a Youth Parliament was a strategy used by one youth forum to enable them to reach more young people within the local community. This provided a better geographical spread of participatory activity across the LA and increased the numbers of young people involved, helping to address criticisms that the forum was not representative of young people within the local community. Using young people to decide the recruitment procedures for the parliament ensured that they had ownership of the process from the beginning.

2.32 As already identified at the youth forum level, **linking in to existing groups/forums** was one way of recruiting young people, but this meant that forums were only as representative as the local groups that they recruited from.

Figure 2.8: How do Schools/Youth Forums Ensure They Are Representative?
Providing a Range of Activities and Communication Mechanisms
Activities at the school level included: school council, eco council, forest school, peer mediation, healthy schools work, community and enterprise activities. The special school was unable to identify young people who were not involved in participatory approaches because all took part in some way, reflecting the 'whole school' approach to participation. Settings used a range of communication methods, such as suggestion and worry boxes, drama and non-written activities, to allow children and young people to express their views in a variety of formats and ensure that as many children and young people as possible could participate.
Ensuring all Year Groups are Represented
One of the primary headteachers noted the benefits of including ALL year groups in the school council. This approach was felt to work well because younger pupils were supported by older pupils. Staff also noted how important it was to allow all pupils to stand for election and not exclude anyone because of their behaviour.

2.33   Those children and young people who were not involved in participatory activity felt their voices were heard; this was especially the case at the primary level. More issues were raised at the secondary level where there appeared to be less pupil attachment to the process. Primary pupils were more likely to feel involved and say '*we are all members of the school council*''. Similarly, pupils and staff from the special school felt that it was easier for pupils to get their voices heard because their school operated more like a primary school.

2.34   In contrast, secondary pupils were less likely to know what went on in the school council and feel included in the process. There is clearly some work to be done in this area, as it appeared that participation within some school settings remained tokenistic. These findings raise an issue about the effectiveness of representatives, regardless of their demographic or personal characteristics. Previous research in Wales has shown that 30-40 per cent of pupils could not name their council representative (Funky Dragon, 2008). Similarly, research in England (Ireland et al., 2006) showed that there were groups of students who were totally unaware of how their school council was supposed to work and what activities representatives undertook.

How Representative Are They?

2.35   Having discussed the strategies used by schools and youth forums to improve representation, we now consider some of the gaps and challenges identified relating to how representative participatory approaches were. These focused on:-

- particular age groups were not represented; and
- the frequency of meetings impacted on how representative approaches could be.

2.36   **Particular age groups were not represented** or participating in some of the settings visited. This included the younger primary age range[5] and post-secondary school age (i.e. 18 plus). Younger age groups were not represented at the community level; for example, most youth forum members were aged 11 and over. Youth forum representatives noted that involving young people aged 18 and over was a particular challenge in terms of accessing and engaging them to become involved. One of the Youth Forum Coordinators felt that, due to access issues, there needed to be a designated youth worker to work with this age group. Conversely, a particular issue for the young disabled people spoken to was the lack of participatory activities available for them to move on to when they were 24 and over.

2.37   The **frequency of school council and youth forum meetings** varied considerably from once a week to once every half term[6]. The frequency of meetings was likely to impact on how effective and representative the participatory processes could be.

Figure 2.9: Gaps and Challenges Associated With Representation
Particular Age Groups Not Represented
'*The 17-25 year old age group is much harder to engage with as they can feel that they have out grown a Youth Council and have other priorities in their lives*' (youth forum coordinator).
The Frequency of Meetings
Some secondary-aged school council members felt that they should meet more frequently: '*I think we should meet more often'* and *'we could meet more often'.*

Issues of Inclusion

2.38   Staff noted that **particular groups were underrepresented** in some settings. These included: Gypsy Travellers, black and minority ethnic children and young people, asylum seekers and refugees, young mothers, and young carers. This raises issues regarding the inclusion of these children and young people in participatory activities.

2.39   Have schools/youth forums questioned how inclusive their participatory activities are? This was beginning to happen, but was clearly an area for further development within a number of the settings visited (particularly at the secondary level). For example, secondary schools recognised the need to ensure the involvement of more disengaged pupils in participatory activities but were having difficulties putting this into practice. Examples were also provided of disengaged students being excluded from membership of the school council (see Figure 2.10).

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[5] The School Councils (Wales) Regulations 2005 state that at least one pupil from each year group from Year 3 and above should be elected to the school council. One of the primary schools in the study only had Year 6 pupils on its school council, one had pupils aged 7 and above, whilst another had pupils from reception upwards.
[6] The School Councils (Wales) Regulations 2005 state that there should be a minimum of six school council meetings per year.

2.40   Examples of targeting under-represented groups, including: detached youth work; mobile provision in rural areas; and proactive work with young parents and young carers; were provided. In order to assess how representative their participatory activities were, staff in one youth forum conducted a 'gap analysis' to identify under-represented groups and then sought to address these shortcomings (see Figure 2.10).

2.41   Schools need to provide more opportunities for young people to be involved in participatory activities, especially those who would not necessarily volunteer themselves. For example, the non-participation of Gypsy Traveller pupils was a particular issue in one primary school. They did not get voted on to the school council because they were generally not at the school long, and also because of the negative views of their peers. This perhaps suggests a need to address non-Gypsy Travellers' views of Gypsy Traveller pupils and introduce more flexible mechanisms to allow their participation.

2.42   Schools and other settings also need to explore establishing mechanisms to allow those children and young people who do not necessarily want to participate in formal participatory activities with opportunities to express their opinion on particular issues.

Figure 2.10: Issues of Inclusion

Two of the youth forums had been criticised by Estyn inspectors for not being representative of the young people within their local communities. In one in particular, it was suggested that young people did not know about the Youth Forum's existence or if they did know of its existence, they did not know how to get involved.

Secondary school pupils noted that one pupil had not been allowed to stand for the school council election by his Head of Year because they were 'on report'. The pupils felt quite strongly that this individual *'should have been given a chance … Everyone should be given a chance, an opportunity to improve. They'd probably feel a bit more involved in what's going on. They might bring a different perspective … It might be good to have someone naughty on the council - they may have different opinions to everyone else'.*

Increasing the Accessibility of LA and School-Based Forums

Increasing the accessibility of a LA-based forum meant that a wider range of children and young people could be involved. For example, school council representatives from the special school had difficulties attending the LA School Council Forum. In order to address this issue, the forum was planning to arrange meetings in different localities so that they would be accessible for special school pupils and to develop cross-school council visits to share good practice.

School settings also provided support for young people with additional needs to ensure that they could access and take part in participatory activities, including those with poor basic skills and non-verbal communication.

Figure 2.10: Issues of Inclusion

In one LA, the senior youth worker meets with under-represented groups who cannot attend the borough-wide meetings in order to feed back what has been discussed and to see if they have anything to add to the issues. The youth forum also provides facilities, such as a crèche for young mothers, which allows them to attend meetings and events.

Linking in to existing detached youth projects

A youth service manager noted that the youth forum was linking in with a new youth justice project in order to develop its links with under-represented young people. Young people involved in antisocial behaviour were identified by the police and community groups and linked into the project managed by a full time youth worker (from the early intervention team). The team '*will parachute into hot spots*' and link young people into existing work going on in the area, including participatory activities.

The youth forum coordinator said that after elections, the forum would '*take stock of who we've got and then sell the benefits to the groups where there are gaps*'. The forum had proactively targeted areas of under-representation: '*We were worried that the council wasn't representative of the Polish community in the county, so I advised a number of schools to put Polish young people on their school councils regardless of whether they got elected or not so that they can then work through to the youth council*'.

3. BENEFITS OF PARTICIPATION

> ## Key Findings: Benefits of Participation
>
> **Benefits for children and young people**
>
> - The case-study work reflected the findings from the literature review (Kendall, 2008), which indicated that consultees were most likely to identify benefits for children and young people. The most common benefits centred on the development of specific skills, knowledge and behaviours. A key point raised by consultees was the transferability of these skills between settings.
>
> - Other outcomes commonly identified were:-
>
>   - helping children and young people speak on behalf of other children and young people;
>
>   - empowering children and young people to make a difference;
>
>   - improved relationships with adults/peers and an improved ability to work with others;
>
>   - the social benefits (making new friends) of involvement in participation.
>
> - Positive benefits related to behaviour and attainment were emerging, but staff highlighted the difficulties of evidencing the impact of participation on these 'harder' quantifiable outcomes.
>
> **Organisational benefits**
>
> - Fewer organisational benefits were identified by consultees than those for children and young people. The most common organisational benefit was that participation resulted in a positive change in organisational practices, services and facilities.
>
> - Other commonly identified benefits included: changes in organisational or community atmosphere and environment; greater awareness of children and young people's needs and facilities meeting their needs more appropriately; and better policy and strategic developments.
>
> **Benefits for staff**
>
> - These were most likely to focus on a belief that the adoption of participatory approaches had led to: an improvement in staff relationships with children and young people, and a better understanding of their needs.
>
> **Benefits for communities and parents**
>
> - These were the most infrequently identified benefits. Despite the limited evidence, there were some interesting examples of improved: parental involvement in schools; perceptions of children and young people in the community; and community resources/facilities.

<table>
<tr><td colspan="1">Key Findings: Benefits of Participation</td></tr>
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Feedback mechanisms and measuring impact

- Staff indicated that they were most likely to provide children and young people with written feedback on their involvement in participation.

- Where it occurred, measuring the impact of participation took place on a relatively ad hoc basis and few settings had implemented formal mechanisms for assessing impact. There were mixed views from school staff regarding the need to formally measure and evidence the impact of participation.

Introduction

3.1   The case-study work reflected the findings from the literature review (Kendall, 2008), which indicated that consultees were most likely to identify benefits for children and young people (e.g. Kirby 2002). Many of the outcomes identified by consultees were interlinked. For example, the development of specific skills and knowledge was felt to have led to improved self-confidence, and improved self-confidence was felt to have led to increased motivation.

Benefits for Children and Young People

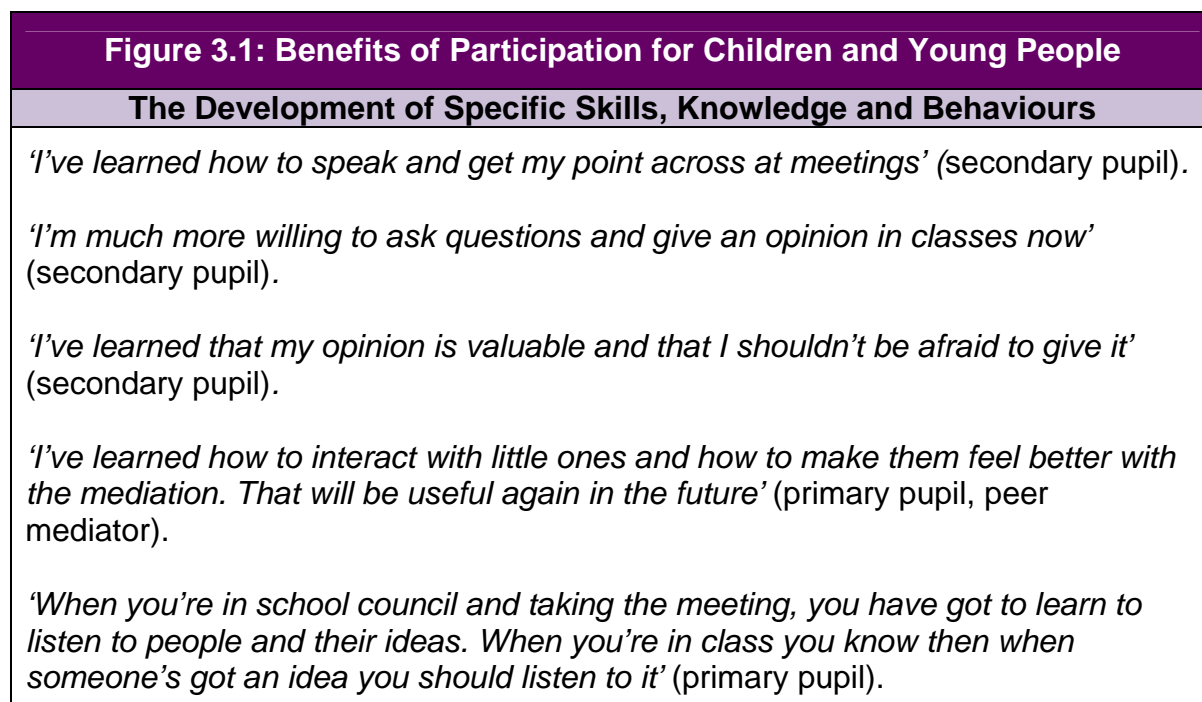**The Development of Specific Skills, Knowledge and Behaviours**

3.2   A significant number of the studies included in our literature review (Kendall, 2008) highlighted that participation helped children and young people develop specific skills and knowledge, in particular, decision-making skills (Kirby, 2002 and Cashmore, 2002); communication and collaboration skills (Hannam, 2001); employment-related skills (Oliver et al., 2006); and specific areas of knowledge, such as politics, citizenship, and democracy (Halsey et al., 2006 and Davies et al., 2006).

3.3   Equally, the most common benefits of participation for children and young people identified by consultees focused on the development of specific skills, knowledge and behaviours, identified equally by children, young people and staff, in all but one of the settings visited (see Figure 3.1 for examples).

3.4   A key point raised by staff, children and young people was the transferability of these skills between settings. For example, young people noted that the skills they learnt at the youth forum were transferable to the school setting, which meant that they felt more confident to ask questions in class. Pupils also noted that improved self-confidence, linked to their participation in the school council, meant that they were more ready to ask questions and voice an opinion in class, or they felt they listened better in lessons.

3.5   The development of presentation skills was the main skill identified. Other key life/work-related skills identified by consultees focused on:-

- decision-making, listening and negotiation skills;

- work-related, enterprise and budgeting skills;

- problem solving, solution-focused approaches, and enhanced critical thinking;

- an increased awareness of democratic processes.

Figure 3.1: Benefits of Participation for Children and Young People

The Development of Specific Skills, Knowledge and Behaviours

*'I've learned how to speak and get my point across at meetings' (*secondary pupil)*.*

'I'm much more willing to ask questions and give an opinion in classes now' (secondary pupil)*.*

'I've learned that my opinion is valuable and that I shouldn't be afraid to give it' (secondary pupil)*.*

'I've learned how to interact with little ones and how to make them feel better with the mediation. That will be useful again in the future' (primary pupil, peer mediator).

'When you're in school council and taking the meeting, you have got to learn to listen to people and their ideas. When you're in class you know then when someone's got an idea you should listen to it' (primary pupil).

3.6   Positive outcomes identified by consultees in all but two settings focused on a view that participation: helped children and young people speak on behalf of other children and young people; made children and young people feel that they could make a difference; and improved relationships with adults and/or peers.

- **helping children and young people speak on behalf of other children and young people:** this was seen by staff as the key reason why many children and young people became involved in participatory activities, i.e. a belief that children and young people should have a say in decisions that affect their lives. Comments from children and young people reinforced this view (see Figure 3.2);

- **felt they can make a difference:** there was evidence that children and young people felt that they could make a difference and had a greater sense of self-efficacy. Clear examples of their impact on the school environment and improved facilities were provided within the schools and youth forums visited (see Figure 3.2);

- **improved relationships with adults/peers** and **improved ability to work with others**. The literature selected for review also highlighted that involvement in participatory activities can improve children and young people's relationships both with adults (e.g. Hannam, 2001; Franklin and Sloper, 2005) and their peers (e.g. Kirby, 2002):-

  – *improved relationships with adults*: the main area of impact identified at the youth forum/community level was addressing inter-generational stereotypes. This was a key issue for young people and, as already highlighted, was one of the main reasons why they became involved in participatory activities at this level. The main areas of impact identified at the school level were that participatory approaches provided opportunities to develop closer and more mature relationships between staff/other adults and pupils;

  – *improved relationships with peers*: children and young people at both the school and youth forum level said that participatory activities gave them opportunities to mix with young people from different age groups and, in the youth forums, diverse backgrounds and localities: '*meeting new people I wouldn't normally meet*' (youth forum member);

  – *improved ability to work with others*: staff in the majority of settings felt that involvement in participatory activity improved children and young people's ability to work with others. These outcomes were linked to an increased confidence to work as a team, for example, across year groups (see Figure 3.2).

3.7   Children and young people across all settings identified the **social benefits** of their involvement in participatory activities, including '*having fun*' and '*making friends*'. An important aspect of the community-based participation work was that it provided social opportunities for young people who were involved in planning and arranging these activities, including conducting risk assessments and arranging transport and accommodation. At the school level, pupils said that they became involved because they wanted to find out what was going on and get involved in 'school business'. This highlights the importance and benefits of publicising and promoting participation activities at a whole school level.

Figure 3.2: Benefits of participation for children and young people
Helping Children and Young People Speak on Behalf of Other Children and Young People
'[Participation] *provides you with an opportunity to show that you are a young adult and have rights and responsibilities and are trusted to do something*' (young disabled person).
Felt they can Make a Difference
Youth forum members in one LA said that they effectively had a '*direct line into the Cabinet and the Chief Executive at the Council*'. Three specific examples of change were cited at the council level:- • the introduction of ID cards for young people; • the introduction of a text-based information service to local residents; and • council investment in the establishment of a community radio station which later helped lever in further funding from the Welsh Assembly and the BIG Lottery Fund. '*The radio station itself is now a tool to engage young people across the county*' (youth forum coordinator).
Improved Relationships with Adults
A youth forum coordinator provided the following example of youth forum members visiting an old people's home: '*They went and told them about the forum. They wanted to dissipate the idea that they're thugs. The elderly were very pleased to speak to them and it's broken down barriers and fear. They want to do more things again in the future*'. '*Once you speak to people* [adults] *who come to school council, you feel more free to talk to other people. If they are an important person and you might see them somewhere – you'll tell them that what the school does is good*' (primary pupil).
Improved Ability to Work with Others
A primary headteacher noted that: '[the participatory activities] *introduce pupils to team working outside of their 'normal class comfort zone*' [which leads to a] *higher level of confidence to work in a team, as the pupils are more practiced at it*'. '[I've] *learnt how to sit in a group discussion and get my voice heard in a group.* [I've learnt how to work in a team which was a] *big thing for me as I never used to be able to do team work*'. Members also noted that they provided mutual support for one another and learnt '*not to interrupt, take their turn, and work together to produce an output*'.

3.8   Benefits for children and young people, which were identified by participants in approximately three-quarters of the settings visited, focused on how they saw themselves and how they saw others: personal development (improved self-esteem/self-confidence and motivation); improved engagement with

school/learning/civil society; improved tolerance/respect for others; and developing a greater understanding of the importance of participation:-

- **personal development** (improved self-esteem/self-confidence and motivation)**:** these improvements were linked to the development of specific skills and knowledge. For example, children and young people gained confidence to speak in front of audiences, adults, and '*important people*' and to make difficult decisions. This impact was identified equally by both staff and young people and was also the most common benefit identified in the literature reviewed (Kendall, 2008) (for example, Davies et al., 2006; Halsey et al., 2006; Hannam, 2001; Haste, 2005).

- **increased engagement with school/learning/civil society** was manifest in a variety of ways, including improved school attendance, behaviour and attainment for a small number of individuals. In addition, increased engagement of children and young people was identified as an outcome by staff from all of the youth forums/networks;

- **improved tolerance/respect for others:** consultees noted that children and young people gained an increased awareness of their rights through their involvement in participatory activities. This was also viewed as a key outcome of participation by staff in one of the primary schools visited. Other schools also had a strong focus in this area and, as previously identified, the special school had achieved UNICEF's 'Rights Respecting School Award' which had a strong focus on raising students' awareness of their rights. The literature selected for review (Kendall, 2008) also showed that involvement in participatory activity provided opportunities for the promotion of positive values, such as respect and tolerance for others and increased awareness of inequalities (Brady, 2004; Gilchrist and Maitles, 2004; and Kirby, 2002);

- for the youth forums, networks and community groups, **developing a greater understanding of the importance of participation** was a clear focus/remit of their work and had been established for this purpose. For example, all the young people spoken to at one of the groups commented on how important it was that they had a voice and that the group provided that opportunity.

Figure 3.3: Benefits of Participation for Children and Young People
Personal Development (improved self-esteem/self-confidence and motivation)

Evidence was provided of increased pupil confidence in class as a result of involvement in the school council and individual examples to show where pupils' *'self-confidence has gone through the roof'* (primary headteacher).

Young people suggested that where previously they would not have felt able to speak in meetings, following their involvement in the youth forum, they were able to lead these meetings: '[before getting involved in the youth forum I would] *never dream of speaking in a meeting, I'm now running them*' (youth forum member).

'A group of people come to see what we do in Eco We had to do a presentation on what we did I was a bit nervous to start with but it went really good…I wasn't so nervous the next time we did it' (primary pupil).

'Sometimes I suppose you have to take quite hard decisions but then it's good practice because you have to make them all the time when you are older' (primary pupil).

'When you're in school council and stuff – people - adults come and see you and you have to talk to them. After that, then you feel that you can talk to anyone' (primary pupil).

All the young people spoken to at the disabled network felt that their involvement in the network had increased their confidence in speaking in public and getting their views heard. Individual examples were also provided: one young person when she joined the network '*would not speak to anyone, now she is really confident and has made lots of friends*'. When she started she said there was '*no way she could move to independent living but now she had seen others doing it and she is moving to independent living*' (young person).

'*It's made me more confident to speak in public and to interact with people. When I first came I had to have an advocate* [to speak for me] *I was so nervous*' (young person).

Increased Engagement with School/Learning/Civil Society

A member of staff working with disabled young people observed that many of the young people were isolated both spatially and socially, so the forum/network provided them with opportunities to feel engaged and included

Improved Tolerance/Respect for Others

The young disabled person's network was described by both young people and staff as giving young disabled people 'a voice'. It was also felt to have increased young people's awareness of their rights, for example, regarding accessibility issues and how to address infringements of those rights. Young people noted that they had gained a better understanding and awareness of other disabled young people's needs and disabilities. Participatory approaches provided opportunities for young people to challenge stereotypes about age, ethnicity and disability and to have their own stereotypes challenged.

Figure 3.3: Benefits of Participation for Children and Young People
Work on revising one LA's Single Plan showed '*people that disabled and non-disabled can work together without barriers*' (disabled young person). The coordinator from one youth forum observed that forum members were now much more tolerant to (Polish) migrants living in the community: '*The young people don't see them as Poles or as migrants with all the coverage in the press but as local young people. They're on first name terms with each other and you can sense that there's tolerance now. They see them as one of them and I've personally seen examples where unacceptable behaviour has been shouted down*'. Young people have a '*greater understanding of disabilities* [as a result of their involvement in the youth forum]. *They've got a more rounded sense of others and can empathise more … A young person was 'dissin' another young person with a disability. One of our forum members said 'we don't behave like that' and dealt with the situation without any need for adult involvement*' (youth forum coordinator).
Developing a Greater Understanding of the Importance of Participation
At the primary school level, this was manifest in pupils having a clear view of what participation was through their involvement in the school council. Pupils in one school noted that they all felt part of the school council (even non-members), reflecting the school's policy of having a wide school council membership. Pupils in this school were also keen to continue their involvement in participatory activities when they moved to secondary school. This highlights how important it is to ensure that opportunities are available for as many pupils as possible at the secondary level. Sometimes opportunities to be involved in decision making were lost when pupils transferred from primary to secondary school. For other pupils developing a greater understanding of participation was more implicit. For example, pupils said that through their participatory activities they had '*learnt how it feels to be in the Welsh Assembly Government*' (primary pupil) and others noted that if their school council did not exist their ideas might go unnoticed. These comments indicate a degree of success, in terms of meeting the aims of the Welsh Assembly Government's participation framework/agenda.

Evidence of Impact on Attainment, Attendance and Behaviour

3.9   The literature selected for review (Kendall, 2008) provided some limited evidence to suggest that participation could lead to improvements in children and young people's levels of **attainment, attendance and/or behaviour**, although the authors acknowledged the difficulties in directly attributing impact to participatory processes or activities (Davies et al., 2006; Whitty and Wisby, 2007).
Davies et al. (2006) noted that the impact of participation on learning, achievement and performance were often key concerns. They suggested that it was difficult to make direct connections and correlations, but that the cumulative 'evidence' seemed to be positive.

3.10   Findings from the case-study work reflected those from the literature review (Kendall, 2008). Consultees' views were mixed and the evidence limited on whether participation impacted on children and young people's attainment, attendance and/or behaviour, but nevertheless there was some evidence for improvements in:-

- **behaviour**: Staff were most likely to identify impacts on children and young people's behaviour. Staff from seven (predominantly school) settings felt that they could identify improvements in behaviour as a result of children and young people's involvement in participatory activities. At the primary level, improvements in behaviour were linked by staff to pupils' ownership of behaviour policies and strategies. Staff from three primary schools felt that they had seen a positive impact on whole school behaviour as a result of pupils' involvement in participatory activities (primarily via the introduction of peer mediation mechanisms and pupil work on revising behavioural policies);

- **attainment**: staff from two primary and two secondary schools identified improvements in attainment, which they felt could be linked (either directly or indirectly) to participation activities (see Figure 3.4). At the youth forum level, improvement in young people's school attainment was hard to evidence but individual examples were provided where it was felt that young people's involvement in the youth forum had helped support improvements in their attainment. Youth forum activities also provided opportunities for young people to gain additional qualifications linked to their participatory work[7]. Members of one youth forum had turned down the offer of formal accreditation as it was '*too much like school*';

- **attendance:** improvements in attendance were only identified as an impact by staff and young people in two settings.

Figure 3.4: Benefits of Participation for Children and Young People
Improved Behaviour
The headteacher from one primary school noted that the school's behaviour policy and, in particular, the sanctions part of the policy was no longer relevant or used since discipline and behaviour was no longer a problem. The headteacher felt that there was a direct and very strong link between this outcome and the various participatory approaches taken to engage with pupils. School staff reiterated this view, noting that since the introduction of these approaches, behaviour in the school had '*improved significantly*', to the extent that the school's behaviour management policy was no longer relevant and neither teacher could remember when a sanction last had to be implemented. It was suggested that this could be largely attributed to the development of a whole school approach. At the same time, the peer mediation project was also seen as key: 'a *few years ago we had a sin bin I don't think it's been used now for about four years'*.

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[7] The Welsh Assembly Government is currently developing an OCN accreditation framework focusing on participation.

Figure 3.4: Benefits of Participation for Children and Young People

Another primary headteacher noted that behaviour management was now peer led and that it was very rare for teachers to be called to resolve matters during break time.

The headteacher at the special school said that they did not have any problems with vandalism at the school because any incidents are '*quickly dealt with by the students because they are involved in maintenance and work on the grounds and buildings*'. This sense of ownership meant that students soon '*censure anybody who does not respect that*'. A member of staff reiterated this view talking about behaviour more generally: '*once you give pupils responsibility, behaviour improves by ten times, once they think they have got a voice and someone in authority is listening*'. A pupil at the school confirmed that his involvement in participatory activities '*helped me care more about school. Instead of rubbish everywhere it is much cleaner*'.

One primary headteacher said that involvement in the school council, and establishing links with a school in Africa, had had a really positive impact on the behaviour of one of the pupils in her school. He was less '*aggressive and being involved in things like that has really influenced him positively'*. The pupil also felt that his behaviour had improved as he had '*more stuff to do and so had less stuff to argue about*'. He observed that he had '*more responsibility*' and felt '*better about things … [I] don't argue with people as much, I'm not in the staffroom as much* [for behaviour] *and I'm getting more sweets* [for good behaviour]'.

Impact on Attainment

Staff in one primary school identified a pupil whose attainment had improved significantly during his time on the school council. As a result of this, the school is now beginning to analyse the attainment data of all pupils on the school council during their time in office. This was a clear example of staff seeing the benefits of participation and then recognising the benefits of analysing data to see what difference participation makes.

Staff from one of the secondary schools linked improvements in attainment across the school to the introduction of more vocational modules. These had been introduced as a result of the school council and other consultation work within the school.

A secondary headteacher said she had seen '*a massive improvement since* [name of pupil] *came to the school. If he hadn't developed his confidence* [through participatory activities] *he wouldn't have been able to have the attainment levels that he has got*'.

Improved Attendance

A youth forum member observed that involvement in the forum had a positive impact on her school attendance: '*it helps you at school*''. When she and her friend joined the forum her school attendance was 50% and her friend had been suspended from school. As a result of their work with the forum her school attendance increased to 100% and both she and her friend were winning awards

Figure 3.4: Benefits of Participation for Children and Young People
for being the most helpful people in school. When asked the reason for this the young person said that if she had been '*doing it by myself*' [i.e. trying to improve her attendance] there would have been '*no point*'. However, now she can '*see the point to it*' because she is working with others and can see the benefits of attending school. A secondary headteacher felt that the introduction of more vocational subjects in the curriculum (due to consultation with pupils) had resulted in improved motivation and attendance, especially among those pupils who may previously have been 'switched off' from their studies: '*It certainly has had an impact on attendance and contribution in classes … A lot fewer pupils want to change subjects now than before: two to three years ago we would have between 15 and 20 pupils wanting to change subject … some were even refusing to attend. Last year, not one pupil requested a move*'.

3.11   School staff noted the difficulties in evidencing changes in attainment, behaviour and attendance as a result of pupils' participatory work. Some felt that they would like support in doing this, whilst others felt that they already collected sufficient data and that this would be an overly burdensome task.

Benefits for Organisations

3.12   Reflecting the findings of the literature review (Kendall, 2008), fewer benefits for organisations were identified by participants than those identified for children and young people. Organisational benefits were more likely to be identified by staff than by children and young people. The most frequently identified benefits were, in order of frequency:-

- changes in organisational practices, services and facilities;

- changes in organisations' or community atmosphere and environment;

- greater awareness of children and young people's needs and facilities better meeting needs; and

- better policy and strategic developments.

3.13   The most frequently identified benefits for organisations were all closely interlinked and, therefore, there is some overlap in the main benefits identified:-

- **changes in organisational practices, services and facilities**: This reflects the findings from the literature selected for review which also found this to be the most common benefit for organisations involved in participatory practice (e.g. Davies et al., 2006; Franklin and Sloper, 2005; Halsey et al., 2006; Treseder and Crowley, 2001). Consultees from all but one of the case-study settings indicated that children and young people's involvement in decision making had resulted in a change to organisational practices, services and facilities. At the school level, pupil and student participation was seen to have had a positive impact on

organisational practices and services in terms of: the use of/need for behavioural sanctions; curriculum and teaching styles; methods of communication; and management practices within schools. At the youth forum level, evidence of changes in LA practices and services as a result of young people's involvement was also observed (see Figure 3.5 for examples);

- **changes in the organisation or community atmosphere and environment**: this was the second most frequently identified benefit and, as already indicated, was closely linked to the first. At both the school and community levels (although this was predominantly identified as an impact at the school level), children and young people's participation was seen to have led to improvements in the physical environment of the school/community (see Figure 3.5 for examples);

- **greater awareness of children and young people's needs and facilities better meeting their needs**: consultees (predominantly staff) from three-quarters of settings felt that children and young people's involvement in decision making had made them more aware of children and young people's needs (see Figure 3.5 for examples);

- **better policy and strategic developments**: were identified by consultees in over half the settings visited, mainly in youth forums and secondary schools, reflecting the remit of youth forum activities and the older age range. Nevertheless, pupils from one primary school had been actively involved in initiating changes to the school's behaviour policy. The main impact on policy and strategic developments was seen at the youth forum level, in two areas in particular: developing procedures/feedback mechanisms and revising existing documents/policies; and influencing decision making within local government (see Figure 3.5 for examples). What impact this level of involvement had was less clear and is something which requires further exploration.

3.14   Other benefits identified in six or fewer settings focused on, in order of frequency:-

- **councils providing services to children and young people**: this outcome was only identified by consultees from secondary schools and youth forums. Specific examples are provided in Figure 3.5;

- **resources allocated more appropriately:** this benefit was identified by consultees from all types of setting. School staff felt that participation had led to more appropriate allocation of resources because pupils were responsible for deciding where money raised by, or allocated to, the school or eco council was spent;

- **improvements in outcomes:** this benefit was only identified by school staff. Staff from youth/community forums did not feel there were able to say whether there had been an overall improvement in outcomes for children and young people, but could nevertheless provide individual cases of improved school attendance, for example. However, school staff did identify improvements in outcomes, which they felt were linked to

participatory approaches (these have already been discussed in Section 3.8);

- **impact on national policies:** this was only identified as an impact by consultees from youth forums/networks probably because they were more likely to be able to impact at this level (see Figure 3.5 for examples).

Figure 3.5: Benefits of Participation for Organisations

Changes in Organisational Practices, Services and Facilities: Schools

In one of the secondary schools, feedback from the school council and the results of pupil surveys were used to inform the focus of issues to be addressed at staff meetings. This resulted in changes to the curriculum and teaching styles e.g. providing a more practical focus to the geography curriculum.

At the special school the whole school management system had been changed to focus on participatory approaches. A school television station was set up because of pupils' involvement in decision making within the school. This was seen as an invaluable communication system, which was set up and run by pupils. Both pupils and staff felt that the key to its success was that pupils had ownership and were driving developments forward. The head boy had also changed the prefect system within the school and introduced a line management structure for prefects to provide a more effective management system.

Changes in Organisational Practices, Services And Facilities: Youth Forum

Examples of young people shaping service provision within LAs:-

- designing CAFCASS complaints leaflet for young people;

- young people providing their views on access to services e.g. young disabled people's access to local services;

- young people monitoring services within LAs to ensure they meet the needs of service users e.g. disabled young people;

- attitudinal changes within the council resulting in an expectation that young people should be involved in decision making within the LA. For example, in one LA, as a direct result of meetings between the youth forum and cabinet members within the council, the cabinet now meets with the youth forum four times a year. Improvements in council services, such as the introduction of the 'child's right to complain', were also identified by consultees.

Changes in the Organisation or Community Atmosphere and Environment

Pupils and staff noted improvements to the school environment as a result of participatory activity, including:-

- a reduction in the amount of litter produced by the school due to the work of litter monitors, the provision of bins, and campaigns to raise awareness of the impact of litter;

- the introduction of recycling facilities at a school and community level, with some schools becoming a focus for community recycling.

Figure 3.5: Benefits of Participation for Organisations

Greater Awareness of Children and Young People's Needs and Facilities Better Meeting their Needs

At least two of the primary schools involved in the study used 'worry' and 'ideas boxes' to gather pupils' views and raise awareness of pupils' needs. The needs and issues identified were then addressed either via the school council or eco council.

Pupils in one secondary school observed that as a result of their involvement in the school council '*teachers had a better understanding of our perspective as children*'. Issues raised by the school council were fed directly back to staff meetings so that teachers had a better understanding of their needs. They also felt that pupil attendance at PTA and governor meetings raised governors' and the PTA's awareness of pupils' needs.

As a result of involvement in a UNICEF project at the special school, staff and pupils redesigned the school's behaviour management approaches which meant that: '*pupils have an expectation of how we should be with them, not just a staff expectation of pupils' behaviour*'. If there are issues, it was felt that staff had the space and ability to talk to pupils and understand why they acted in a certain way: '*we have the ability to do that*' and if pupils feel '*properly listened to – we've been through the discussion process – they feel happier*' (member of staff).

Better Policy and Strategic Developments

Examples of young people influencing decision making within local and national government included:-

- taking young people's views to decision making bodies through regular meetings with strategic policy makers (councillors, Assembly Members, Euro MPs). Youth forum staff from one LA noted that as a result of these meetings councillors now saw the benefits of, and need for, regular planned meetings between young people and elected members. In another LA, staff consulted with pupils on local development plans;

- participation networks, such as the young disabled person's network, provided opportunities for young people to influence strategic decision-making and facilitated direct links with Assembly Members and the Children's Commissioner's Office.

Councils Providing Services to Children and Young People

Examples of improved council services highlighted by consultees:-

- extended opening hours for youth clubs across the LA, following consultation with young people;

- young people successfully opposing the move of the LA's participation manager to leisure services;

Figure 3.5: Benefits of Participation for Organisations
• the police attending a drugs conference arranged by young people with, at the request of young people, real drugs and sniffer dogs;
• a nominated representative working with the council on compliance with disability legislation and regulations, who fed back on this to the whole school. This could be seen as an example of individual participation, which helped to raise whole school awareness of developments in the LA. At the same time, it provided a mechanism by which pupils at the school could influence those developments.
Resources Allocated More Appropriately
In one of the secondary schools, the curriculum was felt to have improved due to the introduction of more varied vocational courses and therefore resources (in terms of funding these courses) were felt to have been allocated more appropriately.
Impact on National Policies
Members of the Young Disabled Person's Network were part of the reference group for the 'Equality of Opportunity Working Group' and young people sat as committee members. The working group produced a report on what it was like to be a young disabled person in Wales which was seen to have shaped policies and support for young disabled people at a national level.

Benefits for Staff

3.15   Only a small number of the studies included in the literature reviewed (Kendall, 2008) identified benefits for staff. Where benefits were noted these included: greater job satisfaction (Hannam, 2001); and a change in staff attitudes; or staff gaining a better understanding of the children and young people they worked with (Waters and Ash, 2000; Mortimer, 2004; and Badham, 2004).

3.16   Benefits of participation for staff highlighted in the case-study phase were, in the main, identified by staff themselves and were most likely to focus on a belief that the adoption of participatory approaches had led to an improvement in: staff relationships with children and young people; a better understanding of children and young people's needs; and, to a lesser extent, benefits to classroom practice. Where children and young people identified benefits in this area they also focused on the first two areas identified by staff:

- **improvements in relationships with pupils and young people:** there was a view amongst school staff that the existence of a school council, and what it represented, helped improve relationships between staff and pupils. However, we would suggest that this will only be apparent if the school council has power within the school and is seen to be able to achieve outcomes. At the community level, participatory approaches, particularly the youth forum work which brought together young people and local councillors, was felt to have improved relationships between

those involved. Participatory activities also provided opportunities for staff from other organisations working with young people to see what they could achieve within the participatory context. Improvements in relationships were most likely to be identified in those schools that had a variety of participatory mechanisms which allowed pupils to express their views, for example school council, eco schools, peer mediation, school council feedback sessions in class and whole school consultation mechanisms;

- **better understanding of pupils' and young people's needs:** participatory approaches were felt to have led to a better understanding of children and young people's needs within the majority of settings. Within the school context these outcomes focused on classroom and non-classroom based issues (although the majority were non-classroom based). In schools with effective school councils they acted as a monitoring mechanism for the school and provided a vehicle by which pupils could raise issues and concerns. School councils also provided a mechanism by which schools could formally consult with pupils on strategic policies and behaviour management;

- **benefits to classroom practice:** were only identified by participants in half of the schools visited. Given the benefits identified by those where impact had occurred, we suggest that this should be seen as a key area for development.

Figure 3.6: Benefits for Staff
Improvements in Relationships with Pupils

Primary school headteachers provided examples of improved relationships between staff and pupils. This was linked to a view that staff got to know pupils much better as a result of their involvement in the school council. Engagement in participatory activities meant that staff met with pupils in a different context, where the relationship was based on more of a partnership: '*It* [the school council] *has definitely helped us communicate better with the children; it's much more of a two-way dialogue now*' (primary headteacher). In this primary school, teachers had to make presentations to the school council for some of their budget allocations, so the council was seen to have real power.

School staff felt that pupils were more responsive to them because of participatory approaches, such as peer mediation, which gave pupils an opportunity and authority to act; they did not always have to wait for teachers to intervene. Giving pupils greater responsibility and ownership was seen to have led to the development of more mature and trusting relationships between staff and pupils. This view was reiterated by pupils: '*The teachers know that we are responsible and that they can trust us if they need us to do any jobs for them'.* One primary headteacher felt that she knew pupils much better as a result of the school council, which brought them together on a regular basis. She also noted that school staff felt that '*the children are now more responsive to them*' because they use the school council as a lever for action i.e. '*it's not down to us* [teachers], *you deal with it, what are you going to do about it?*' It was noted that, for example, if there was a problem with behaviour in the playground pupils would intervene before staff and would also raise the issue in class.

Better Understanding of Pupils' and Young People's Needs
Staff from two schools provided instances where pupils had been able to raise issues and concerns about school staff, which they might not have felt able to do via existing mechanisms. This meant that appropriate action could then be taken by the school. Staff working with young disabled people noted that involvement in participatory activities increased **their** awareness of young disabled people's rights. The network provided an opportunity for staff to work with young people in a different context which raised their awareness of young people's skills and abilities. This view was reiterated by young people who said that the participatory mechanisms/networks provided opportunities for them to show adults/staff that they had a broad range of skills, which might not be seen within a school setting.
Benefits to Classroom Practice
Active engagement of pupils regarding curriculum issues could be seen at both the primary and secondary level. At the primary level this included the development of outdoor learning policies and the outdoor curriculum. At the secondary level, participatory approaches were felt to have benefited classroom practice by resulting in the revision of the curriculum to include more vocational subjects, and the introduction of more accredited courses, as well as impacting on the curriculum content, i.e. introducing a focus on the 'Rights of the Child'.

Benefits for Communities/Parents

3.17   Consultees were least likely to identify benefits for communities and/or parents, again reinforcing the findings from the literature review (Kendall, 2008). Indeed, the need to raise parental awareness of participatory activity was a particular issue for secondary school and youth forum staff. Despite the limited evidence, there were some interesting examples of benefits for parents and communities, including improved: parental involvement in schools; perceptions of children and young people in the community; and community resources/facilities:-

- **improved parental involvement:** this was only identified as a benefit by primary school staff, reflecting the generally closer home school relationships at the primary level. Participatory activities such as the school council, eco council and 'healthy eating' initiatives were all felt to have led to greater parental involvement in the school. Only a small number of studies identified for review referred to benefits for parents/carers. These were all small-scale and based on perceptual and anecdotal evidence. The main benefits identified focused on providing parents/carers with opportunities to develop their skills in supporting and working more effectively with their children (Brady 2004; Badham, 2004; and Mortimer, 2004);

- **improved perceptions of children and young people:** was predominantly identified as a benefit by youth forum representatives. At the youth forum level, both staff and young people felt that perceptions of young people had improved as a result of their involvement in positive activities within the community. This improvement was linked to the

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intergenerational work that had taken place. Given that a desire to improve perceptions of young people within the local community was one of the motivating factors for young people's involvement in participatory activities, it was beneficial that they could see positive results in this area. The literature selected for review also found that participatory activities can help to improve the image of children and young people within the local community and challenge negative stereotypes (Gray, 2002; Save the Children, 2005);

- **improved community resources/facilities:** was most frequently identified as a benefit at the youth forum level. Young disabled people were involved in local and national groups that campaigned for better facilities, as well as monitoring existing services to improve disabled access, for example. At the school level, this was not generally identified as a benefit, as schools tended to focus on improving their own facilities and resources. However, there were a couple of exceptions where individual schools were increasingly being seen as a community resource e.g. recycling centre for the local community, and opening up their grounds and facilities for community access;

- **other benefits identified:** staff from two youth forum settings felt that opportunities for young people to be involved in participatory activities had resulted in positive changes in individual young people's home lives. Participatory approaches within schools were also felt to have led to the establishment of links with schools and students in other countries.

Figure 3.7: Benefits for Parents/Communities
Improved Parental Involvement
At the primary level examples were provided of parental involvement in a range of activities including: tree planting, landscaping the school grounds, building an outdoor classroom, painting murals and fund raising. One primary headteacher described the closer home/school links that had developed as a result of school council activities because pupils '*discuss things more openly at home with their parents about what goes on in school'* and as a result parents come in and get involved. The headteacher felt that she knew the parents better, e.g. she knows them on first name terms, which had resulted in greater parental involvement in the school. The headteacher said that parental involvement had increased because the pupils get them involved in activities. This view was reiterated by pupils at the school, who said that their parents had helped supply materials for the outdoor classroom. To try and address the lack of parental involvement at the youth forum level, one forum had introduced an awards ceremony for parents. However, raising parental involvement was still seen as an area for development.
Improved Perceptions of Children and Young People
The special school's Estyn report noted that the school's extensive work in, and for the community, had helped *'raise the profile of the school in the local community'* (Estyn 2008).

Figure 3.7: Benefits for Parents/Communities
For young disabled people, involvement in participatory activities at the local, regional and national level meant that they were visible within their communities and helped them to address issues regarding access and equality. Examples were provided of inter-generational work, projects and meetings which were felt to have improved perceptions and challenged stereotypes on both sides. Both youth and community youth forums were often based in areas where the perceptions and portrayal of young people were extremely negative, so staff and young people felt that it was crucial that participatory activities/approaches addressed these issues.
Improved Community Resources/Facilities
Interviewees from individual youth forums provided examples of improved community resources as a result of the work young people had been involved in, such as the establishment of a community radio station and working with other community groups to oppose the closure of existing community resources. The special school had used the work of the School Council and Eco Council to develop the school grounds as a resource for the community and other schools. The school had also established a number of enterprise schemes including a café, hairdressing salon, car washing and recycling facilities, and a task force that went out into the community to provide gardening services and removal of unwanted furniture etc. This was felt to have improved community resources and also facilitate the school's integration into the local community.

Mechanisms for Providing Feedback

3.18   The provision of feedback is crucial to ensuring that children and young people feel that their views and opinions have been taken into account. Even if changes cannot be made as a result of their participation, they need to know the reasons why. Lack of feedback can mean that children and young people become cynical about the participation process.

3.19   Staff were asked what mechanisms they used to provide feedback to children and young people about the participatory practice they were involved in. Staff were also asked what mechanisms they used for evidencing and measuring the impact of participatory practice. It should be noted that there was substantial overlap in consultees' responses to these two questions. Despite evidence of feedback taking place, a number of challenges were identified by staff and young people, which are discussed in Chapter 4.

3.20   Staff indicated that they were most likely to provide children and young people with written feedback. Children and young people were also involved in providing feedback to their peers and staff (usually this was verbal feedback). Figure 3.8 provides some examples of the types of feedback mechanisms used by staff:

- **written feedback**: both school and community based staff provided written feedback via minutes of meetings; for example, from school council, eco council, community group or youth forum meetings. In some settings, minutes of meetings were posted on school or youth forum websites, increasing their accessibility for non-participants. Records of meetings also provided a mechanism for monitoring progress and impact. Folders detailing the activity of the school or eco council were also used to monitor and provide feedback to members at the end of the year;

- **verbal feedback**: at a school level, verbal feedback was provided to non-participants via whole school assemblies. For example, pupils gave presentations to assemblies regarding developments/proposals; as well as to classes via school council representatives. We suggest that the best examples of the latter were where designated time was set aside for school council representatives to feed back information, and for class members to raise any issues they wanted to be addressed. Staff from the special school and some of the young disabled people spoken to indicated that they would prefer to receive verbal feedback because of the difficulties they had accessing written feedback. This highlights the importance of ensuring that feedback mechanisms are appropriate for the needs of the children and young people involved;

- **visual feedback**: some interesting visual mechanisms had been used by school and community settings to provide feedback to children and young people (participants and non-participants) on participatory activities (see **Figure 3.8**).

Figure 3.8: Feedback Mechanisms	
Main Mechanisms Used	
Written • minutes of meetings • feedback forms • session records • websites • newsletters • questionnaires • suggestion boxes • pen picture profiles	**Verbal** • presentations • conferences • meetings • school assemblies • class updates **Visual** • presentations • photographs • video • TV • digital stories
Written Feedback	

Evidence of whole school consultation processes were provided by two schools e.g. annual school surveys. The survey findings were then either used to provide topics for staff development days or were discussed in school council, staff meetings and/or by SMT: '*we've analysed the findings of our school survey and have discussed it both with the school council and at staff team meetings and the SMT*' (headteacher). The findings were then used to inform curriculum and non-curricular developments. In two of the primary schools, school council members had been surveyed or asked to provide feedback to teachers on teaching content and styles. This was something staff were keen to progress further.

Schools used suggestion boxes to identify issues to be addressed by school councils and eco councils and then used council meetings to discuss the suggestions raised and reported back to the rest of the school on the developments made. One of the primary schools posted the suggestions from the suggestion box on a blog thread, linked to the school website, increasing their accessibility.

One of the youth forums asked organisations and services that wanted to consult with young people to complete a 'Request for Consultation' form (see Annex A) detailing the feedback (nature and type of feedback) that would be provided to young people if they decided to be involved in the consultation activity. This youth forum also used the 'National Participation Standards' to structure how feedback was provided to children and young people.

A member of staff working with a LA-based group for young disabled people said that they used questionnaires to obtain feedback from young people about the

Figure 3.8: Feedback Mechanisms
activities they were involved in. The questionnaires had happy faces for things they enjoyed and sad faces for things they did not enjoy. Staff used that information to plan the summer activities and introduced new activities, such as gymnastics. Staff and young people also conduct a planning session at the beginning of each term and draw up a list of activities for the coming term. A coordinator from one of the locally based young disabled groups said that she produced a map showing the activities and achievements over the year to provide an overview for young people and their families. She also completed a quarterly monitoring form to update the group on activities undertaken.
Verbal feedback
One primary headteacher observed that feedback was provided via assemblies to the whole school, which often involved presentations by school council members and others (e.g. eco group) on the work done and progress made. There was also time within classes for school council members to provide detailed feedback, and to ask for views and opinions on what the school council should be discussing. Secondary school council members noted that '*we get feedback about budgets – what's possible for us to change and what's not'.*
Visual feedback
School and youth forum staff also used photographic evidence and videos of participatory sessions to provide feedback to children and young people and evidence the work they had completed. The TV station at the special school was used by pupils to provide an overview for all pupils of the participatory activities going on in the school. The headteacher retained a copy of everything broadcast so that the school had a record of all events and achievements. School and youth and community forum websites were used to present visual feedback on the activities young people were involved in.

Measuring/Evidencing Impact

3.21   Very few settings looked at the impact of involving children and young people in decision making and participatory activities. There was also limited evidence of this in the literature. The studies which met the criteria to be included in the literature review (Kendall, 2008) were predominantly qualitative in nature and generally small scale. Benefits and impacts were usually evidenced via perceptual data. The quantitative data presented in the literature which suggested that children and young people's participation could be linked to improvements in 'hard' quantifiable outcomes, such as attainment and attendance, needs to be treated with caution, given the challenges in attributing causality.

3.22   Where it occurred at the case-study level, measuring the impact of participation was done on a relatively ad hoc basis and few settings had implemented formal mechanisms for assessing impact. Staff were more likely to identify individual examples of impact, highlighting changes in the visible environment of the school, or changes to the curriculum as evidence of impact of participatory approaches. A range of mechanisms were used for recording work completed, which were used by staff to evidence outcomes, such as visual and written records (these were highlighted in the previous section). Staff provided some positive examples of young people monitoring and evaluating participation/practices (see Figure 3.9).

3.23   There were mixed views from school staff regarding the need to formally measure and evidence the impact of participation activities. A number of primary headteachers said that they would welcome support in developing mechanisms for monitoring impact (both 'soft' e.g. improvements in self-esteem and self-confidence; and 'hard' outcome data) and recognised that more could be done to track the impact of participation. This was a key priority for one of the primary schools over the coming year.

3.24   The secondary headteachers were more cautious. They felt that they already collected sufficient data or did not want to place additional data collection burdens on members of staff. At the youth forum level, coordinators provided examples of conducting impact assessments and providing impact evidence for annual monitoring requirements for Cymorth funding (see Figure 3.9).

3.25   Clearly staff need to be able to 'see the benefits' of collecting impact data, rather than feeling they are collecting data 'for data's sake' (see Figure 3.9 'seeing the benefits'). There is a clear need to identify ways that staff can evidence impact without the burden of additional data collection.

3.26   Interviewees also noted the difficulties in attributing positive outcomes to participatory approaches, given the range of other factors that might lead to these outcomes. Nevertheless, three of the primary schools felt that they could provide evidence of positive impacts on behaviour as a result of the introduction of participatory approaches across the whole school (see Section 3.8).

Figure 3.9: Measuring impact
'Seeing the Benefits'
One primary headteacher noted a '*significant improvement'* in one pupil's self-confidence and attainment levels linked to their time on the school council. As a result of this apparent impact they are now monitoring the attainment levels of all school council members during their time in office to see whether it has a positive impact.
Evidencing Impact
One of the youth forums undertook 'impact assessments' of work in progress at every borough-wide youth forum meeting. This meant that youth forum members were regularly updated as to the success of their activities. This youth forum also held a conference at the beginning of the year for everyone involved to set the aims for the coming year. This was then distributed to the youth forum subgroups who then reported back to the cabinet of the youth forum. Young people from a LA based group for young disabled people produced a series of 'digital stories' highlighting the activities they were involved in and the difference membership of the group had made to them: '*I think that is a good way of showing how* [name of group] *is having an impact on their lives*' (co-ordinator).
Young People Monitoring and Evaluating Participation/Practices
In one youth forum, young people acted as internal assessors of participation activities to ensure that children and young people were being involved in participatory activities throughout the forum. In another LA, young people conducted annual assessments of organisations providing services for children and young people within the LA, for example, hospitals, doctors' surgeries, voluntary organisations etc. Successful organisations received a kite mark for their work, stating that they met the required standards.

4. CHALLENGES/BARRIERS TO PARTICIPATION

Key Findings: Challenges and Barriers to Participation
Resource and capacity constraints • Resource and capacity constraints were the main challenges/barriers to participation, identified by both staff and young people. They were noted as a particular challenge to widening participation by staff and young people from youth forums. **Staff attitudes** • Changing staff attitudes was identified as one of the biggest hurdles to widening participation in schools. **Children and young people's skills** • To a lesser extent, ensuring that children have the skills to participate was a barrier noted by primary school staff. Clearly more needs to be done to challenge these attitudes and promote good practice where it is taking place. **Access issues** • Access to participatory opportunities for young disabled people, and engaging under-represented young people, was identified as a barrier by staff and young people at the youth forum level. **Negative experiences of participation** • A number of young people and staff raised issues regarding the feedback young people received, and the lack of impact that their participation was seen to have had. Children and young people did not know what had changed as a result of their involvement in decision making. • Children and young people also identified inappropriate consultation methods and issues of tokenism. The challenges of managing both the expectations of other young people and peer views of participation were also highlighted.

Introduction

4.1   This section describes the main barriers and challenges identified by consultees in terms of widening participation or maintaining existing participatory approaches. Where identified, it also provides examples of how barriers and challenges have been overcome.

Challenges and Barriers to Participation

4.2   The main challenges and barriers identified by staff and young people focused on: resource and capacity constraints; staff attitudes; staff skills; children and young people's skills; and access to participatory opportunities for particular groups of young people.

- **resource and capacity constraints:** resource and capacity constraints were the main challenges/barriers to participation, identified by both staff and young people. They were noted as a particular challenge to widening participation by staff and young people from youth forums:-

    - *resource constraints* restricted the scope and volume of work that staff could be involved in and the participation levels of individual young people (see Figure 4.1 for examples). The cost of/access to transport was a significant barrier for young people accessing youth forums and networks;

    - *capacity constraints* were identified as a challenge by both staff and young people (see Figure 4.1). Secondary school staff noted that they did not have the capacity to expand participation activities due to a shortage of time in the school day. Managing the numerous requests for consultation was a particular issue for some of the youth forums and networks, leading to a danger of 'over consultation' and burn out for the young people involved. It was acknowledged that more effective management of these requests was required;

- **staff attitudes**: changing staff attitudes was identified as one of the biggest hurdles to widening participation in schools. There was still reluctance on the part of some headteachers to involve pupils in staff recruitment and to appoint associate pupil governors at the secondary level. Youth forum staff felt that some school staff were reluctant to engage with the forum, which was seen to have a negative impact on embedding participatory approaches across LAs. Young disabled people felt that some professionals, due to a lack of awareness/training, made incorrect assumptions about what they could and could not participate in and often consulted with their parents/carers, rather than directly with the young people themselves;

- **staff skills:** staff lacking the skills to deliver effective participatory approaches was a further challenge commonly identified by staff and young people;

- **children and young people's skills:** to a lesser extent, ensuring that children have the skills to participate was a barrier noted by primary school staff;

- **access to participatory opportunities for young disabled people and engaging under-represented young people:** was identified as a barrier by staff and young people at the youth forum level. Young disabled people noted physical access issues, in terms of their ability to access buildings where meetings and events were held. Criticisms that some youth forums were not representative of the communities they served have already been

discussed in Chapter 2. Furthermore, accessing under-represented young people was particularly challenging for staff if the young people were not linked to existing groups or services. The potential for the exclusion and/or marginalisation of under-represented individuals and groups is clearly evident. As already identified (in Chapter 3) some youth forums had sought to address this issue by targeting under-represented groups via community outreach work.

Figure 4.1: Barriers and Challenges To Participation
Resource and Capacity Constraints

Resource constraints:

The role was described by one youth forum coordinator as delivering a '*universal service with targeted funding*'.

The Young Disabled Person's Network was coordinated by one person who was entirely dependent on local support groups bringing young people to the meetings and supporting the network. If the local groups have to make cutbacks then the sustainability of the network is put into question.

One of the key barriers identified by young disabled people and the staff working with them was the lack of funding for support staff to allow the young people to participate. This was highlighted in the following young person's quote: '*if they can't go, I can't go*' (young person). A suggestion was made at the network meeting that some young people within the network could possibly take on the role of supporting other young people. However, they would need to receive appropriate training and payment for taking on such a role.

The vast majority of advice/consultation work that young people were involved in at a youth forum/network level was on a voluntary basis. A particular issue for the disabled young people was that they were providing 'expert' advice, e.g. advising on rights for disabled young people, but generally did not receive any payment for their work.

A lack of staff to support the development of youth forum work also meant that some forums were unable to fully engage their target age group i.e. 11 to 25 year olds (tending to work with the more accessible 11-18 age range).

Difficulties accessing public transport to attend meetings meant that young people were reliant on staff or parents to transport them, which inevitably excluded some young people from the participation process. Transport was raised as an issue in both rural and urban areas. Transport costs were raised as a barrier to participation by the special school. However, the headteacher said that she would approach the local community to fund transport costs so that pupils could attend particular events. She felt that the community was willing to provide funding because the school provided services for the community so '*it's not always us asking for money*'.

Figure 4.1: Barriers and Challenges To Participation

Capacity constraints:

Lack of staff capacity in the secondary school day to expand participation. Strategies used to try and overcome staff capacity issues focused on devolving responsibility for participatory approaches to a wider range of school staff. This also helped embed the principles of participation within the whole school ethos so that it was not seen as an 'add on' but an intrinsic part of the whole school approach. One secondary school had given responsibility for coordinating the school council to a non-teaching member of staff. Although there could be issues here regarding the status accorded to the school council if it is not seen as intrinsic to curriculum delivery.

One youth forum managed the numerous requests it received for consultation by asking organisations to complete a 'request for consultation form' enabling young people to assess the most appropriate consultation processes they should be involved in (see Annex A). A longer-term strategy to address this issue might be to widen the membership of the youth forum and/or establish special interest groups (as one youth forum had done) that are responsible for consultation in particular areas.

Young people who were involved in a large number of participatory activities commented on the difficulties of managing their commitments, particularly when they were not consulted regarding their availability for meetings (suggesting that young people are not seen as partners within the process). It was also noted that many requests for consultation and feedback often had an unacceptably tight turnaround.

In some schools, school council meetings were still held at lunchtimes, i.e. pupils were giving up their own time to attend meetings. Primary and secondary pupils raised this as an issue:-

'We meet at lunchtime. There's not enough time to go through the agendas. Some pupils are not keen on giving up lunch times' (secondary pupil).

'We could meet more often and not at lunch times. It can mean we have to go without lunch' (secondary pupil).

'Sometimes we miss out on other things to come to school council' (primary pupil).

A secondary headteacher highlighted the benefits of changing school council meetings from lunchtime to registration time. It was felt that the school council became '*much more powerful and effective*' when it was given this status and pupil attendance at meetings also improved. The status of the council was also reinforced by holding meetings in the school's conference room.

Staff Attitudes

One teacher observed that '*it's about convincing staff* [to get involved]*, not pupils, they'll happily get involved*'. This school sought to address negative staff attitudes

Figure 4.1: Barriers and Challenges To Participation
by providing INSET for staff and governors about how to work with children and young people. It was also felt that staff attitudes began to change once staff saw the benefits of participation, such as, improved behaviour and additional resources (linked to enterprise activity) in the classroom. The headteacher noted that once staff could see the benefits they became advocates and suggested other ways of involving pupils in participatory activity within the school. This school also had a strong emphasis on promoting young people's rights and responsibilities, which it was felt made the school a '*mutually respectful place*' and helped change staff attitudes to participation. Young disabled people were concerned that, due to the attitudes of some staff, consultation mechanisms were focused on their parents/carers: '*If they want to talk to you they don't talk to you individually, they talk to your parent or carer. They treat you like a child*''. They suggested that this could be addressed by ensuring that young people designed and delivered training to professionals. This was something which was beginning to take place. There were plans for network members to receive training so that they could deliver training to a range of service staff on how to work with young disabled people. Some youth forum staff noted reluctance on the part of school staff to engage with them in participation processes at a LA level; for example, it was suggested that link teachers did not attend meetings because they were held in the evenings. Engaging schools in the process and ensuring a better flow of information between schools, youth forums and young people's partnerships was seen as a further challenge. Challenges associated with involving pupils in staff recruitment were highlighted by staff at the special school: '*we would have to think very carefully about how pupils are involved in staff interviews because of issues of confidentiality*'.
Staff Skills
Examples were given of staff lacking the skills to allow children and young people to participate effectively by providing too much support; for example, by leading discussions and suggesting to young people what they should say, rather than standing back and allowing them to resolve issues themselves. The ability for staff to allow young people to have ownership of issues is an important skill for staff involved in this field. Examples were provided of participatory activities that had failed because young people did not have ownership of the process.
Ensuring Young People Have the Skills to Participate
The youth forums/networks and the special school involved in the study had undertaken a great deal of work focusing on raising young people's awareness of their rights to try and ensure that young people had the skills to participate At the primary level, there was a more practical focus and the challenge was ensuring that all pupils understood what was discussed at meetings, what was required of them as a result of these meetings, and that they had the skills to do this e.g. to gather other pupils' views. Managing the wide age range within school council meetings was also viewed as a challenge by primary school staff.

Figure 4.1: Barriers and Challenges To Participation
Access to Participatory Opportunities for Particular Groups of Young People
Young disabled people felt that support for them to access mainstream participation activities was limited and that organisations who invited them to participate did not always consider how their disability might affect their engagement. For example, young people noted that even venues which were supposed to be fully accessible for disabled users were not. They cited examples of disabled ramps with tight turns which were too tight to manoeuvre a wheelchair up, lifts not working, residential accommodation where there was nothing to hold on to in the shower, and anti-slip flooring that was not anti slip. A strategy was employed whereby young disabled people visited and assessed proposed venues to ensure that they were fully accessible, but this had resource implications for the organisations and young people involved.

Negative Experiences of Participation

4.3   A number of young people and staff described young people's negative experiences of participation, which served to increase their cynicism about the participation process. They raised issues regarding the feedback young people received and the lack of impact that their participation was seen to have had. Children and young people also identified inappropriate consultation methods and issues of tokenism; and the challenges of managing the expectations of other young people and peer views of participation.

Feedback Issues

4.4   Staff and young people raised concerns about mechanisms for feeding back information to children and young people, as well as across organisations/services. They also raised questions regarding the quality of the feedback received. Even those staff who provided feedback felt that this was an area which required further development and improvement. Levels of feedback, and the degree to which it was a formalised mechanism, also varied considerably across settings:-

- **lack of feedback** was raised as an issue across all of the settings visited. Within some of the secondary schools non-participating pupils were not aware of what the school council had achieved. We suggest that raising awareness of such achievements and introducing clear feedback mechanisms must be a key priority for those schools wishing to widen participation;

- **mechanisms used for feeding back information to young people**: young people felt that these were less effective than those established for feeding information 'up the line' (see figure 4.2). Furthermore, in some schools feedback was the responsibility of one member of staff. Such an approach was unlikely to encourage staff and student ownership of the participation process. At the secondary school level, there appeared to be challenges in joining up the work of the school council and other participatory approaches and practices. We suggest that in order to be

successful, school consultation requires a much broader remit than the school council. A lack of feedback mechanisms meant that young people reported difficulties in both receiving information from the youth forum (via their school) and feeding information to their peers in school about the work of the youth forum. We suggest that, in order to achieve successful participatory approaches across LAs, these links need strengthening.

Lack of Impact

4.5   There was growing frustration and increasing cynicism on the part of young disabled people in particular, that despite their involvement in participatory activities '*nothing changes*', and that improvements to the services they received were not forthcoming. This was a question young disabled people put to the Welsh Assembly minister when they met with her.

4.6   In schools, (as already identified) pupils were most likely to be involved in consultation activities focusing on facilities and the school environment, limiting the potential for their participation to impact on the curriculum and strategic decision making within the school. At the LA level, a lack of mechanisms to allow young people to influence policy and practice limited their ability to impact on the services provided. Thus, there was limited evidence of changes in budgetary spending as a result of consulting with young people at this level.

Inappropriate Consultation Methods and Tokenism

4.7   Young people provided a number of examples of their negative experiences of participation at the youth forum/network level; these all related to their involvement in consultation activities (see Figure 4.2 for examples). The procedures underpinning young people's involvement in participatory activity could lead to disillusionment with the process, as could a view that participatory activities were tokenistic (see Figure 4.2). `

Managing Expectations and Peer Views of Participation

4.8   Young people involved in participatory activities, such as school councils, expressed frustration that they could not always achieve what they set out to achieve, due to a lack of funding, for example. It was, however recognised that this was a learning process in itself. As well as managing their own expectations, children and young people also had to manage the expectations of their peers. Secondary school pupils were the only consultees to suggest that there was peer pressure not to be involved in participatory activities, but even here it was not raised as a significant issue. Where participation was embedded within the school ethos, this was unlikely to be raised as an issue.

Figure 4.2: Barriers and Challenges to Participation

Feedback Issues

School and youth forum staff emphasised how important it was that children and young people could see changes being made as a result of their involvement, or at least be told why things could not happen, to address possible disillusionment and growing cynicism with the participation process. This was a particular issue raised by young disabled people and staff working with them. Staff noted how crucial it was that young people received feedback, even if nothing could be done, otherwise they '*become cynical to the process*'. This view was reiterated by the young people themselves.

A young person who was involved in a wide range of participatory activity, including the school council, the youth forum and Funky Dragon felt that '*information feeds up but it doesn't feed down*'.

Lack of Impact

In one LA, youth forum members were involved in decision making that directly affected them but were less involved in other decision making bodies within the LA. Staff felt there was a need to bring councillors in to young people's decision making forums within the authority.

Youth forum staff in a number of LAs felt that further work was required to develop relationships between young people and key decision makers within the LA to improve the potential impact of young people's participation on strategic decision making. For example, staff noted that there were good relationships with council members, but not middle managers. Similarly, relationships with the lead member for children's services were good, but relationships with elected members needed to be developed.

Inappropriate Consultation Methods and Tokenism

Young disabled people provided examples of inappropriate consultation methods. These focused on:-

- the language and resources used which meant, for example that they were unable to read handouts;

- use of jargon; and

- being repeatedly asked their views on the same issues, which meant that the quality of the consultation experience was poor.

Youth forum members noted that the length and format of forum meetings could be challenging.

The procedures underpinning young people's involvement in participatory activities was raised as an issue by young disabled people. They highlighted that involvement in some participatory activities, e.g. volunteering, had to be facilitated via their social workers. This was felt to undermine their right to make decisions on their own behalf. This reflected the comments of other young disabled people who

Figure 4.2: Barriers and Challenges to Participation
suggested that they felt excluded from the decision making process about their participation because it was their parents/carers that were consulted with rather than the young people themselves. Issues of tokenism: youth forum members provided examples where they felt participatory activity within local councils, [e.g. consultation on access plans had been 'tokenistic' and that they had been brought in to 'rubber stamp' decisions that had already been made]. This was reiterated by a member of staff who felt that there was still a need to convince '*those with power that what young people say is valid and valuable*'.
Managing expectations
A school council member noted the need for them to manage pupil expectations: '*other pupils don't understand why they can't get something*'. Providing feedback to the rest of the school about the reasons why things could not be achieved was seen as one way of overcoming this challenge. In addition, using older pupils to manage the expectations of younger pupils was a successful strategy used by one primary school.

5. GOOD PRACTICE, LESSONS LEARNT AND AREAS FOR DEVELOMENT

Key Findings: Good Practice, Lessons Learnt and Areas for Development

Good practice identified

- A range of good practice was identified in the settings visited. This focused on both operational processes and ensuring that participation was an intrinsic part of the school/organisational ethos.

- Good practice in operational processes focused on:-

  - having a clear view of aims, objectives and desired outcomes, which helped establish a framework for participation;

  - the active involvement of children and young people in decision making processes at all levels, including strategic decision making;

  - mechanisms for providing feedback and evaluation; and

  - the delivery of training and development

Lessons learnt

- When staff and young people were asked to identify what lessons they had learnt as a result of their involvement in participatory activity they focused on key success factors, such as: opportunities for group learning; the relationships between staff and young people; children and young people's ownership of the participation process. They also identified a number of lessons learnt in relation to addressing particular challenges/barriers. These were: logistical challenges; the time taken to implement change; and funding issues.

Areas for development

- Areas for development identified by consultees focused on a number of core themes, which have already been raised in this report. These were: increasing the representativeness of participatory activities; ensuring that activities impacted on decision making within and across settings; and introducing mechanisms for measuring impact.

Introduction

5.1   A range of good practice was identified in the settings visited, which focused both on operational processes and ensuring that participation was an intrinsic part of the school/organisational ethos.

Good Practice: School/Organisational Ethos

5.2   **Ensuring that participation was an intrinsic part of the school/organisational ethos** was clearly the case in a number of settings visited and was an aspiration for the rest. Where it had been achieved, participation was part of the whole school/organisational approach, which impacted on all activities. Within these settings, participation was not a series of separate activities and staff were clear that it could not be an addition to their other work. Staff and young people noted that in order to be successful, participatory approaches required a senior advocate within the school/organisation to promote and support its development, especially during the initial stages of implementation. The seniority of the member of staff was felt to ensure that participatory approaches were given the necessary time and resources to become embedded and successful.

5.3   Where participation was embedded within the organisational ethos, this could be seen to be the result of committed individual(s) who 'saw the benefits' or had the vision for introducing participatory approaches. The ethos of those individuals had driven the work forward (see Figure 5.1 for examples). Having a key driver to promote participation allowed structures and strategies to be implemented which supported the process and ensured that participation was embedded within the school/organisational ethos. As previously highlighted, to successfully implement such an approach within a setting, all 'staff have to be able to see the benefits'. Once this was the case, they too became active in promoting participatory approaches. This highlights the importance of staff training focusing on the benefits of participation, sharing responsibility for participatory approaches across staff teams and having strong strategic leadership and support.

Good Practice: Operational Processes

5.4   Good practice in operational processes focused on:-

- having a clear view of the aims, objectives and desired outcomes;
- the active involvement of children and young people in decision making processes at all levels, including strategic decision making;
- providing feedback and evaluation;
- the delivery of training and development;
- the conduct of elections and allocation of budgets; and
- specialist support allowing particular groups of young people to participate.

Having a Clear View of the Aims, Objectives and Desired Outcomes

5.5   Having a clear view of the aims, objectives and desired outcomes of participatory practice when establishing such activities was seen by staff as good practice (see Figure 5.2 for examples). Such an approach was felt to help establish a clear framework for participatory activity. Staff noted the benefits of children and young people's involvement in setting the aims and objectives of participatory activity and monitoring progress in meeting outcomes. It was suggested

(as already identified) that some participatory activities had previously failed because of a lack of ownership on the part of children and young people.

The Active Involvement of Children and Young People in Decision Making Processes at all Levels

5.6   Good practice identified here focused on children and young people actively engaged in, and having ownership of, decision making processes at all levels, for example staff recruitment (this has already been discussed in Chapter 3). Previous research (Funky Dragon, 2008) has shown that young people often call for involvement in higher levels of decision making than they are often allowed. Our study showed that where children and young people were involved in recruitment, consultees felt that it gave them ownership of the process, helped establish credibility and accountability, and a belief that their views would be listened to. Actively engaging children and young people in decision-making processes was seen as good practice by staff because it allowed young people to develop a wide range of related skills and to take ownership of, and responsibility for, the process (see Figure 5.2 for examples).

5.7   A number of good practice examples were given where children and young people had provided direct input into strategic plans at both the school and LA level, for example School Improvement Plans and LA's Single Plans. There was no evidence yet of the impact this has had, in terms of the delivery of services. However, at the school level, where children and young people had provided direct input into curriculum reform, there was evidence that pupil engagement had improved.

5.8   At a LA level, young people tended to meet with councillors via adult reporting mechanisms and through these mechanisms they were felt to have directly impacted on policy and practice within the LA. However, there were some concerns that this approach was not the most effective way of involving young people and one LA was seeking to establish its own mechanisms, whereby councillors attended young people's meetings.

Providing Feedback and Evaluation

5.9   Much of the good practice identified here has already been discussed previously in Chapter 3. The main areas highlighted (see Figure 5.2 for examples), primarily by staff, were:-

- ensuring that feedback mechanisms were in place and building in feedback and evaluation mechanisms to all participatory approaches;

- involving children and young people in assessing services and activities;

- using children and young people to gather the views of their peers; and

- ensuring that strategies existed for sharing good practice.

The Delivery of Training and Development Related to Participation

5.10   One of the youth forums provided regular training and development on participation for staff working in the LA's youth provision and also provided support and training for secondary school staff and pupils on the requirements of the school council legislation. This training and support was seen as good practice because it raised staff awareness of the benefits of participation, promoted children's rights and responsibilities, and highlighted gaps and issues. Staff within community/centre based youth forums also said that they valued the support they received from youth forum staff in promoting a participatory approach (see Figure 5.2 for examples).

5.11   Good practice examples were also cited of training which gave young people the skills to teach professionals/services how to work effectively with children and young people. It was felt by both staff and young people that this training had a wide range of potential benefits for both trainers and trainees. Young people in a small number of settings had also been involved in delivering peer training on particular participatory activities, including a sexual health programme run by pupils and training to run the pupil led school library. These peer-led training programmes were seen to be effective because they enabled young people to pass on the skills they had learnt.

The Conduct of Elections and Allocation of Budgets

5.12   School staff felt that using adult election processes, such as ballot boxes and election slips and asking pupils to deliver 'campaign speeches' to support their nomination, was good practice because it helped develop children and young people's political awareness. School staff also noted that giving the school council their own budget and appointing a treasurer to manage resources was good practice, as it increased their sense of ownership and responsibility.

Figure 5.1: Good Practice: School/Organisational Ethos
Ensuring Participation Was an Intrinsic Part of the School/Organisational Ethos
In a number of schools, successful participatory work was linked to a key driver within the school: '*He* [deputy headteacher] *saw the importance of participation and environmental work*' and provided the impetus for its introduction, '*he brought it in. I didn't believe we could have done it'.* 'He said '*it's a great school but no one comes in, we've got to get the community into the school*'' (headteacher). Staff comments in settings where these principles were embedded within the whole school/organisation reflected this approach '*this is not my school, this is your school*' (primary headteacher) and '*this is the young people's network, not mine. I just assist them*' (network coordinator). For services, such as the youth service (and for staff working within that service), participation was seen as the cornerstone of their work. A primary school teacher reflected how participation was embedded within the whole school approach: '*It's very easy with these things to slip into the mode of paying lip service. I think we've tried to go beyond that here. We felt we needed to go past the toilet and school uniform things and take a whole school approach, making sure we listen and reflect on pupils' views*'.

Figure 5.2: Good Practice: Operational Processes
Clear Aims and Objectives

In one school, all participatory activities had a constitution detailing their aims and objectives, the conduct of elections, the regularity of meetings and details of rights and responsibilities. An example of the aims and objectives detailed in one constitution are detailed here: '*To work within the local community by providing an environmental group of volunteers to develop more extended relationships between environmental staff, pupils, parents and the local community; to engage in activities which support the community and advance the education of the member of the Task Force and provide and assist in the provision of a services to the community as the Task Force consultation with the governing body shall determine*'.

The Active Involvement of Children and Young People in Decision Making Processes

Good practice examples were provided of young people co-chairing council meetings, co-chairing youth parliament 'task and finish' groups, being members of the steering group for an advocacy programme and forming committees to run individual groups and networks, as well as running conferences and workshops. Children and young people's involvement in adult decision making bodies at this level also acted as a monitoring mechanism, ensuring that their issues and views were kept on the agenda and that meetings were 'young people friendly'.

Young people forming a committee to run a local action group

In one LA, a group had been established '*to let disabled children and young people in the LA have their say about the services they receive and the issues that affect them on a daily basis*'. Older members of the group formed a committee: '*to influence and guide the work of the main group*'. The committee focused on the main issues that the young people wanted to address, for example transport and work placements for disabled young people. It was responsible for directing the work of the main group and for organising group meetings and was described by a staff member as '*real young people's participation in action*'.

Young people co-chairing LA strategic decision making groups

In one LA, youth forum members co-chair 'Strategic Coordinating Group – Enjoy and Participate' (SCoG) meetings focusing on the provision of services for young people within the LA. This is one of four SCoGs that sit below the Children and Young People's Framework Partnership: Framework Board. Two youth forum members co-chair the meetings '*to make sure young people are listened to*'. This work was identified as an example of good practice by Estyn (2007): '*young people have good opportunities to get involved in decision-making about the planning of youth support services. These include the work of the youth forum and local forum groups on housing estates with Communities First. A good example is the joint chairing by two young people of one of the Strategic Coordinating Groups, which is working well*'.

The recruitment of staff and young people

In one of the secondary schools the headteacher himself had been interviewed by pupils. He felt that this was such a positive experience that the school adopted this approach for all staff recruitment.

In one LA, youth forum members were responsible for the recruitment of young people to the Youth Parliament that was being established. A member of staff from the youth forum noted that, despite frustration on the part of chief officers about how long the process was taking, in order to secure young people's involvement and buy-in it was felt to be crucial that they guided the process from the beginning, they '*must decide on recruitment processes*'.

Active engagement in decision making, providing children and young people with a wide range of related skills

The enterprise activities that some of the schools were involved in were seen as providing particularly good opportunities for pupils to be actively involved in real '*hands on*' decision making. A primary headteacher felt that the entrepreneurial work that the school council was involved in was an example of good practice because it helped pupils '*understand more about the world of work and understand their responsibilities – already some of them are thinking about their futures. It affects how they think about school life and life in general, they are more committed*'. These activities were felt to develop a range of skills including: decision making, fund raising, evaluatory skills (looking at the pros and cons of different suggestions), engaging other people (adults and children), and obtaining quotes. She observed that these activities all required and developed skills which pupils could then use in other aspects of school life. For example, pupils had successfully secured a grant for playground improvements. This had involved writing to the funder stating their reasons why they thought they should receive a grant. On receipt of the funding, pupils met with surveyors, appointed a project manager and finance manager to complete the costings, met with sales representatives, devised a pupil questionnaire to find out what improvements they would like and met with planners to plan out the work

Taking responsibility for/ownership of the decisions made

A primary headteacher noted that, in order for pupils to take responsibility for the decisions made, staff had to '*step back and have the confidence to allow the pupils to take their own decisions*'. This approach was seen as good practice because it gave pupils opportunities to learn how to cope with making the 'wrong', as well as the 'right' decisions, for example addressing the consequences of overspends on budgets.

Youth forum staff felt that giving young people control over what they were consulted on, for example by using 'request for consultation forms', was a further example of good practice (see Annex A).

Good practice identified by staff and young people focused on children and young people having ownership of the meetings they were involved in, for example:-

- deciding the agenda;

- facilitating and chairing meetings (school and council level);

- taking minutes of meetings;

- responsible for inviting staff and councillors to meetings.

Young people responsible for establishing participatory mechanisms

In one school, pupils had established a school TV station. Good practice was seen in pupils' ownership and control of the TV station. A pupil from the school noted that some participatory activities like the school TV station were unsuccessful in other schools '*because the pupils aren't allowed to take on responsibility for it and they provide information which pupils find irrelevant*'. This view was reiterated by the headteacher who noted that: '*a lot of schools have TV stations but they don't turn it over to the pupils*'. Staff noted that pupils were actively engaged in talking with the headteacher about the development of the TV station, reflecting the adult relationships developed between staff and pupils.

Good Practice in Providing Feedback and Evaluation

Ensuring that children and young people were involved in assessing the services provided: young people in three LAs were responsible for assessing participatory activity or attended council meetings to ensure they took account of young people's needs. Children and young people were also involved in monitoring services and producing procedures. It was felt to be good practice that they were paid for this work.

Using children and young people to gather the views of their peers, for example when addressing curriculum reform, or where pupils were responsible for providing a service to/support for their peers, such as sex education or peer mediation, was viewed as good practice by staff consultees.

Ensuring that feedback mechanisms were in place, for example:-

- via 'request for consultation forms';

- that the feedback loop was complete, i.e. that feedback was provided both 'up' and 'down the line'; and

- that organisations and consultation processes provided opportunities for feedback, particularly in relation to why practice had changed or, perhaps more importantly, why it could not be changed.

Building evaluation mechanisms into participatory activities: for example, one primary headteacher conducted an annual review of the work of the school council, identifying key learning points to be taken forward for the following year.

Mechanisms for sharing good practice: in one LA, a LA School Council Forum had been established to share good practice between secondary school councils.

Two young people from each secondary school council meet on a half-termly basis to discuss progress and developments. The group was established '*because young people wanted the different school councils to work more closely together. It will also run elections for the Funky Dragon School Council Representative. This representative is now elected from the forum and feeds information to and from Funky Dragon*' (forum website).

Good Practice in Training and Development

In one LA, the youth service provided support and training for secondary school staff and pupils to raise awareness of, and compliance with, the school council legislation. This was seen to play an important role in addressing particular issues, such as: the timing of meetings (i.e. not to have them at dinner time or after school); to have proper elections; and do not use councils as a strategy to remove misbehaving pupils from the classroom. Youth service staff ask schools if there is any training they require or any training the young people require. The range of support/training that could be provided for young people, included:-

- what a school council is;

- how to chair meeting;

- how to be a treasurer;

- how to communicate to their peers; and

- any other training that the young people identify that they require.

Support/training for teachers, included:-

- any particular training issues identified, for example schools have requested training on minute taking;

- what is a school council;

- awareness of the school council legislation;

- benefits of a school council;

- what can be achieved in a school council;

- how school councils should be run; and

- highlighting the benefits of young people's involvement to staff.

Future priorities identified are: continued training for teachers, residential away days for young people, and increased awareness and participation.

Lessons Learnt and Areas for Development

5.13   By way of summary, this chapter concludes with some of the key lessons learnt by staff and young people involved in participatory activities, as well as the areas that they felt required further development. These comments clearly reflect the good practice identified earlier and therefore it should be noted that there may be some repetition in what was identified.

Lessons Learnt

5.14　When asked to identify what lessons they had learnt as a result of their involvement in participatory activity, staff and young people focused on: what worked well/key success factors; and particular challenges and barriers that they had to address:-

- **what worked well/key success factors** identified by consultees focused on (see Figure 5.3 for examples):-

    - *group learning*: a number of the youth forums had participated in joint development work with other youth forums. Both staff and young people recommended that other groups (forums/networks and schools) seek out similar opportunities to help develop their practice. Similarly, consultees felt that such approaches raised awareness of activities that other groups were involved which meant that work was not duplicated;

    - *raising the profile of participation* was identified as both a key success factor and an area for development by staff. At the school level, the importance of including a wide range of staff in participatory activities and ensuring that participation was high on the school agenda was seen as critical to its success. Youth forum staff also highlighted the need to show the value accorded to participation by the LA, for example holding events in high profile locations;

    - *relationships*: developed between young people and staff were seen as critical to the success of participatory approaches. Staff and young people noted that relationships had to be based on mutual respect and understanding. Developing relationships between young people and strategic decision makers, such as elected members, was also seen as critical to ensuring political buy-in and access to resources (see Figure 5.3);

    - the benefits of *children and young people's ownership of the participatory process* has already been discussed in Section 5.2. Staff again raised this as a key success factor for participation. They noted that when children and young people were involved in, for example drawing up the rules and agendas for participation, they were able to understand their commitment and roles and responsibilities. Ownership of the participation process meant that children and young people were taking their own ideas forward, which also helped address sustainability issues. Young people and children noted the importance of establishing ground rules regarding expected behaviour and conduct within participatory activities: '*you need to establish ground rules for working in a group*'.

5.15 Lessons learnt in relation to **challenges and barriers** focused on (see Figure 5.4 for examples):-

- staff identified the ***logistical challenges*** of running participatory activity across large geographical areas. This was one of the reasons why funding for transport was so critical for many of the youth forums and networks. Staff highlighted the need to be realistic about what could be achieved when working across a wide geographical area and not to be too ambitious. Establishing area based or regional groups or sub committees was seen as one way forward (but again this could be limited by funding constraints);

- the ***time it takes to implement changes***: youth forum staff noted that councillors and local authority staff needed to be allowed sufficient time to accept young people's views and implement changes. Young people reiterated this view suggesting that young people needed perseverance in order to implement changes: '[you've] *got to keep on going at it and try not to get frustrated*';

- ***funding*** has already been identified as one of the main challenges faced. However, interviewees did provide some useful insights in how to manage this challenge. Inevitably funding directs the nature of the work and consultees felt that staff need to be creative in how they delivered the work.

Figure 5.3: Lessons Learnt
What Worked Well/Key Success Factors
Members from one youth forum provided a useful outline of the lessons they had learnt and the advice they would give to other youth forums starting out:- • *Get your friends to set up a group* • *Get a diary and plan meetings* • *You need transportation to get about* • *Put posters up* [to publicise the work of the forum] *after getting the school library to print them for free* • *Ask for donations from local shops* • *Get local councillors' support* • *Use local council meeting rooms for free* • *Get sympathetic teachers and voluntary organisations to spread the word*
Group Learning
A youth forum member noted the benefits of learning from other groups: '*if you aren't sure about something, go to another group for advice*'. Pupils in one primary school recommended that members of staff who are thinking of setting up a council should '*visit other schools and speak to them about what*

Figure 5.3: Lessons Learnt
they're doing'. Or, alternatively they suggested that schools invited other councils to the school to speak about what they do.
Raising the Profile of Participation
Youth forum staff highlighted the importance of running events in 'high profile' locations, which showed the value accorded to participation by the LA and youth forum and, subsequently, the value accorded to young people's views. Staff felt that arranging events in these venues meant that they were much better received by all participants and the young people got a '*real buzz*' from being involved.
Relationships Developed
Young people noted that relationships between young people and staff were critical to the success of participatory activity: '*if they don't get along* [with staff]*, young people won't attend. [You] need a bond between the young people and youth workers*'. Young people provided recommendations on how meetings should be run in order to reflect mutual respect: '*Don't have youth workers coming to meetings and talking **to** young people. We take it in turns chairing meetings and youth workers take minutes so we can concentrate on what we're discussing*'.

Figure 5.4: Lessons Learnt: Challenges/Barriers
Logistical Challenges
A coordinator from one of the young disabled groups said that initially she wanted to set up groups across the LA and initially did run a number of evening groups but young people did not attend. She wondered why young people did not attend as most would like to be involved but '*it's whether they get the chance*', for example their parents might not want them to be involved, or be unable to transport them.
Funding
One secondary headteacher indicated funding challenges faced by the school council but also noted how this had resulted in a realisation of the need to allocate a budget to the council: '*I would like to be able to realise more of the things that young people come up with. Unfortunately, we have to say 'no' sometimes. They accept that and don't think it is a waste of time, but there is a finance issue involved. We need to make a stronger link between the finance available and the wishes of the council. I think we should allocate them a budget so that they can utilise this'.* **Strategies for overcoming funding challenges:** One headteacher suggested that headteachers and managers may need to go out of their LA to secure funding for particular activities. This is an approach that her school had taken in order to fund additional out of school sporting activities. Similarly, staff also indicated that school councils and other participatory activities needed to use the resources of the school, for example administrative support, in order to support their work.

A youth forum coordinator noted that if elected members are able to see what young people have achieved (through developing relationships with young people) then they are more willing to commit resources.

Areas for Development

5.16   Areas for development identified by participants focused on a number of core themes, which have already been raised in this report. These were: increasing the representativeness of participatory activities; ensuring that activities impacted on decision making within and across settings; and introducing mechanisms for measuring impact (see Figure 5.5 for examples):-

- **representativeness and inclusion**: consultees expressed a desire to make participatory activities more representative, in order to engage as wide a range of young people as possible, e.g. disengaged students and under-represented groups in the community, and to broaden the range of perspectives provided. It was hoped that this could be achieved by: broadening the range of activities available in order to make them more attractive to a wider group of young people; improving/developing links with under-represented groups in the community; and giving younger pupils more responsibility. The latter point also highlights the need to ensure that the enthusiasm and skills of primary pupils are not lost when they transfer to secondary school.

- **ensuring that activities impacted on decision making within, and across, settings** so that participation activities inform strategic level decision making at the school and council level. School staff felt that issues addressed by the school council and other participatory mechanisms needed to feed more directly into school strategies and curriculum reform. In order to ensure that participation was an intrinsic part of the whole school/organisational approach, staff recognised the need to strengthen or develop links between:-

  – school councils and the teaching team/other staff within the school;

  – school councils/youth forum and parents: where this had already been achieved the benefits were noted;

  – school and community/youth forum links.

- **measuring impact**: as already identified, there was recognition and a desire from participants within some settings to measure the impact of participation on children and young people, in terms of both soft and hard outcomes.

Figure 5.5: Areas for Development
Increasing Representativeness
One secondary headteacher noted that they would like to extend the responsibilities given to older pupils, to younger pupils within the school: '*Some of what happens in the sixth form* [via the sixth form forum] *could be extended to younger children. We are good at giving responsibilities to the sixth form and sometimes it is easy to forget that Year 7 pupils have been leaders in their primaries and we need to make sure we tap in more to that potential'.* This also reflects the issue that the enthusiasm and skills of primary pupils can be lost when they transfer to secondary school.
Ensuring that Activities Impacted on Decision Making Within, and Across, Settings
One secondary headteacher felt that there could be a *'better link between the school council and the self-assessment work of the school. That's informal at present'.* He saw that there were more opportunities for the school council to feed into the School Development Plan: '*the current School Development Plan has 18 months or so left to run. I would like to self-assess the whole school and review the year with pupils'*. This could then be integrated into the planning cycle of the school.
Measuring Impact
The commitment to gather pupil views on curriculum changes were articulated by one headteacher: *'It's one thing for us to say to staff that we do it* [curriculum changes] *like this. We'll need to get the feedback from the pupils as to how it* [curriculum changes] *is being implemented. We'll need to capture the impacts from the view of the pupil'.*

6.   CONCLUSIONS

6.1   The findings from this study suggest that children and young people were involved in a broad range of participatory activities at both the school and LA level. Furthermore, young people's involvement in one group was cited as a springboard to their involvement in other participatory activities, showing clear progression opportunities for those involved and the potential they had to develop a wide range of related skills.

6.2   Participatory approaches provided a range of different contexts for relationships and/or interactions to develop between children, young people and staff. They also provided opportunities to shift the 'balance of power' in these relationships, whether this was between school staff and pupils, councillors and youth forum members, or support staff and young disabled people. Participation provided opportunities to change attitudes, develop new skills and relationships which were more egalitarian and democratic.

6.3   Other benefits resulting from involvement in participation included: changes to organisational practices, services and facilities; staff having greater awareness of children and young people's needs; and improved relationships between staff and children and young people.

6.4   The study identified a range of good practice, which could be used for improving participatory approaches. This included mechanisms to ensure that participation was an intrinsic part of the school/organisational ethos and the active engagement of children in decision making at all levels.

6.5   Despite these positive developments, some challenges were identified. The following recommendations are addressed to staff at the school/organisational and LA level, as well as policy makers at the national level.

Recommendations

Particular Age Groups Were Not Represented

6.6   Youth forum staff noted the challenges of engaging older age groups in participatory activities. Additional support for youth forum staff in engaging older age groups, i.e. those aged over 18, would be beneficial. There also appears to be a need to identify additional participatory activity that young disabled people can become involved in once they reach the age of 24.

6.7   Some of the primary schools did not include younger pupils within their school councils. We suggest that there is a need to ensure that all primary headteachers are able to see the benefits of engaging younger age groups in participatory activities. It may be beneficial to use the positive examples presented in this report that show the benefits of involving all pupils in participation. Raising awareness of more creative participatory opportunities would also help to challenge the views of some primary school staff that younger pupils do not have the skills to participate.

Ensuring Staff Buy-In

6.8   This study has shown that in order for participation to become embedded within the school ethos, staff have to be able to see the benefits to ensure their buy-in. Publicising the benefits of participation and the positive outcomes for pupils **and** staff (for example, in terms of improvements in behaviour within the classroom and more engaged pupils), should help secure staff buy-in. This highlights the importance of staff training focusing on the benefits of participation, sharing responsibility for participatory approaches across staff teams and having strong strategic leadership and support for participation.

6.9   We also suggest that in order to secure staff buy-in, there is a need for schools and other organisations that are establishing participatory approaches, to reflect the value they place on such activities by the time allocated for activities and the seniority of staff involved.

Recruitment, Inclusion and Representation

6.10   This study has shown that professionals are key gatekeepers and facilitators to children and young people's participation. This highlights issues for the engagement of those young people who are not linked to professionals or services. The examples provided in this study of youth forums identifying those young people who were not represented (for example via gap analysis) and undertaking community outreach work may be one way forward. How the participation of these young people is maintained and embedded within participatory approaches is something which requires further exploration.

6.11   Schools need to look at how representative their participatory activities are and actively seek to recruit those young people who are not represented. Schools and other settings also need to explore opportunities which allow children and young people to provide feedback and voice their opinions, even if they do not want to be part of more formal participatory mechanisms, such as school councils.

Clear Aims and Objectives

6.12   The study also highlighted the benefits of staff and young people being involved in establishing clear aims, objectives and desired outcomes for participation within their organisations. Sharing these aims, objectives and priorities with all staff and young people would help promote ownership of, and engagement with, participatory activities across schools and organisations. Such an approach would also assist schools and organisations in identifying the difference made and evaluating the impact of participatory approaches.

Feedback and Evaluation

6.13   A number of young people and staff raised issues regarding the feedback young people received and the lack of impact that their participation was seen to have had. It is important that all staff are aware of the importance of feedback in maintaining children and young people's engagement in the participation process. Feedback is also a necessary function of monitoring and review, required for any

self-assessment process. Self-assessment tools can provide a useful way to help schools and organisations measure the progress they have made.

6.14   Within the settings visited, there was a clear focus on inputs and outputs and getting children and young people to participate, without necessarily recording or linking these activities to outcomes. Staff noted difficulties in measuring and attributing outcomes (particularly 'harder' quantifiable outcomes, such as attainment, attendance and behaviour) to the participation process. If participation is to become embedded and sustainable, the benefits have to be clear, and organisations need to be able to reflect on the progress they have made. This again highlights the benefits of self-assessment so that schools and organisations can reflect on the progress they have made.

6.15   Implementing formalised feedback and evaluation mechanisms should be seen as a key area for development across all settings. The monitoring of school council members' levels of achievement during their time in office might be a useful strategy for evaluating the impact of participation.

6.16   School council members were often asked to collate the views of their peers and report back to the council, as well as being responsible for feeding information back from the school council to their class. In terms of assessing the representativeness of these views and effectiveness of feedback mechanisms, we suggest that some monitoring of these processes is required.

Social Benefits and Raising Awareness

6.17   Children and young people across all settings identified the social benefits associated with their involvement in participatory activities. In order to widen participation, we suggest that staff and young people need to promote these social benefits as a means of encouraging other young people's involvement.

6.18   At the school level, pupils also said that they became involved because they wanted to find out what was going on and get involved in 'school business'. This highlights the importance and benefits of publicising and promoting participation activities at a whole school level and would also help address criticisms from some secondary school pupils that they were not aware of what was going on within their school council.

Developing Links Across Settings

6.19   Consultees noted the benefits of engaging staff and young people in group learning opportunities across settings. However, some tensions were noted between youth forums and schools, which meant that these opportunities might not be taken advantage of. There is a need to develop links and learning between youth forums and school councils. This would provide the opportunity to use experiences from across a range of settings to develop stronger participatory approaches across LAs.

ANNEX A
YOUTH FORUM REQUEST FORM

Youth Forum Request Form

The Youth Forum receives many requests and invitations to get involved in different pieces of work. Unfortunately there just isn't always the time for us to do everything that we're asked to. So, if you wish the young people on the Youth Forum to be involved in an event/project that you are running, please complete the following form as thoroughly as you can The young people on the forum will then look at this, and get back to you as soon as possible to confirm whether or not they are able to become involved.

Organisation:

……………………………………………………………………………………....

Contact Name:

……………………………………………………………………………………

Contact Details (Phone number, address and email):

……………………………………………………………………………………

……………………………………………………………………………………

Event/Project Details (incl. date, times, venue etc.):

……………………………………………………………………………………

……………………………………………………………………………………

Please give a description of what you would like the Youth Forum to do:

……………………………………………………………………………………

……………………………………………………………………………………

If the event is a conference/presentation, can you tell us a little bit about the make up of the audience/delegates?

……………………………………………………………………………………

……………………………………………………………………………………......

Can you tell us why you would like to involve young people in this event/project:

………………………………………………………………………………………….

………………………………………………………………………………………….

How do you plan to 'follow-up' the work done with the youth forum (e.g. updates, future events etc.):

………………………………………………………………………………………….

………………………………………………………………………………………….

What provisions have to you made (or plan to make) to ensure that your project/event is 'young person friendly'?

………………………………………………………………………………………….

………………………………………………………………………………………….

What are the anticipated learning outcomes that the young people could achieve by becoming involved in the project/event?

…………………………………………………………………………………………..

…………………………………………………………………………………………..

ANNEX B
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