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# A Review of the National Participation Standards Charter and Kitemark for children and young people

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# A Review of the National Participation Standards Charter and Kitemark for children and young people

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Views expressed in this report are those of the researcher and not necessarily those of the Welsh Government

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## **Glossary**

### **Children's Rights Advisory Group (CRAG)**

CRAG is an expert body that advises Welsh Government. It is made up of representatives from the Children's Commissioner for Wales office, Children in Wales, UNICEF UK and the Wales Observatory on Human Rights of Children and Young People.

### **National Participation Standards (NPS)**

NPS are a set of 7 standards that are used to support organisations who work with children and young people to embed good practice around participation.

### **Office for Police and Crime Commissioners (OPCC)**

The office supporting Police and Crime Commissioners in overseeing policing and ensuring community safety.

### **Public Service Board (PSB)**

A partnership of local public bodies that work together to improve the wellbeing of people in a defined area, in line with the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act (Wales).

### **Rapid Evidence Assessment (REA)**

A streamlined and time limited method of reviewing existing research to produce a balanced and reliable summary of evidence more quickly than a full systematic review.

### **Regional Partnership Board (RPB)**

A statutory board that brings together local authorities, health boards, and other partners to plan and deliver integrated health and social care services within regions across Wales.

### **United Nations Convention on Rights of a Child (UNCRC)**

An international treaty that sets out the civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights that all children are entitled to, and requires governments to protect and uphold those rights. It covers 54 articles that cover all aspects of children's lives, including Article 12 which states that all children have a right to be heard.

### **University Health Board (UHB)**

Regional organisations responsible for planning and delivering NHS healthcare services in Wales.

# 1. Introduction and background

In July 2025, the Welsh Government commissioned Ecorys UK to carry out a review to understand the take-up and implementation of the National Participation Standards (NPS) Charter and Kitemark across public sector organisations in Wales. This built on preparatory research work undertaken by Welsh Government, with the support of Children in Wales, in 2024. The review was carried out between July and December 2025 and comprised of desk research and stakeholder research. This report presents the draft findings and conclusions from the review.

## 1.1. Background policy context

The Welsh Government was the first UK nation to embed the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) into domestic law through the [Rights of Children and Young Persons \(Wales\) Measure, 2011](#). This places a duty on Ministers to have due regard to the UNCRC and a responsibility for ensuring children and young people in Wales are aware of their rights. The [Children's Rights Scheme 2021](#), sets out how the Welsh Government will meet its duties under the Measure, including the participation of children in decision making giving effect to Article 12 of the UNCRC. It states that that children and young people have the right to express their opinion and to have their views taken seriously when decisions are being made that might affect them.

Alongside the Welsh Government, there are other stakeholders that champion children and young people's participation in Wales. They include:

- [Children in Wales](#), a national umbrella body for organisations and individuals who work with children and young people and Wales. They lead on Welsh Government funded initiatives including implementation of the NPS Charter and Kitemark, and Young Wales, a representative participation body which supports Welsh Government in the development of policy.
- The [Children's Commissioner for Wales](#), an independent human rights institution whose role is to promote and protect the rights of children and young people in Wales. The Commissioner's [three year strategy \(2023-2026\)](#) outlines key strategic priorities underpinned by the UNCRC including empowering children and young people, advocating for children's rights, and amplifying children's voices. '[The Right Way](#)' is a principled framework for adopting a children's rights approach developed by the Children's Commissioner for Wales and the [Wales Observatory on Human Rights](#). One of the five principles is participation. The Right Way aims to support public bodies to integrate children's rights into decision-making, policy and practice.
- The [Wales Observatory on Human Rights](#), is a research centre based in Swansea University. They work collaboratively with partners to influence policy and practice in Wales and internationally. The Observatory plays a key role on supporting the implementation of the UNCRC in Wales, including supporting public bodies to embed children's rights into decision-making processes.

## 1.2. The National Participation Standards

The [National Participation Standards](#) (NPS) were developed in 2007. These are a set of 7 standards that are used to support organisations who work with children and young people to embed good practice around participation. The standards were updated in 2017 to reflect a stronger rights-based approach. The updated standards were co-produced with children and young people.

All 22 local authorities across Wales are mandated to promote and facilitate children and young people's participation. In order to meet this duty, and those placed upon them in the [Well-being of Future Generations \(Wales\) Act 2015](#), local authorities are 'expected to work with relevant partners to adopt the National Participation Standards'. Other organisations across the public, private and third sector in Wales working directly with children and young people are also encouraged to adopt and embed the NPS within their practice. The Standards are further reflected in numerous Welsh Government policies and embedded into the Children's Commissioner for Wales's *The Right Way*.

Forming the focus of the current study, the NPS Charter and Kitemark were established as tools to support the implementation of the standards in Wales. Specifically:

- The NPS Charter was established in 2019 for organisations looking to adopt the Standards to voluntarily demonstrate their commitment to them over a 2-year period. The Charter application process involves submitting a statement outlining the organisation's achievement against the standards. While organisations can re-apply to the Charter, they are encouraged to work towards achieving the NPS Kitemark.
- The NPS Kitemark (established in 2017) is awarded to organisations that have successfully embedded the 7 standards within their practice and is valid for 4 years. To achieve the Kitemark, organisations must carry out a self-assessment, including providing evidence of effective implementation of the standards. Organisations are then externally inspected by a group of children and young people called Young Inspectors, who are recruited and trained to review and assess organisations.

Welsh Government funds Children in Wales to manage the implementation of the NPS Charter and Kitemark, including the Young Inspectors. It should be noted that the Kitemark process has been on hiatus since 2023, while a review to understand the take-up and implementation of the NPS Charter and Kitemark across public sector organisations in Wales is being concluded.

## 1.3. Objectives of the review

The purpose was to understand the barriers faced by public sector organisations to applying for the NPS Charter and Kitemark schemes, following preparatory work undertaken by the Welsh Government and Children in Wales that found take up of the schemes amongst the public sector in Wales was low. Findings from this review seek to inform the Welsh Government's evidence-based decision making regarding the future of the NPS Charter and Kitemark schemes.

Specifically, the two main aims were:

**Aim 1:** To review evidence surrounding the efficacy of charters, accreditation schemes and awards in supporting organisations to embed national approaches in practice. This aspect of the research will synthesise key literature to understand the characteristics of the most effective approaches for the public sector.

**Aim 2:** To undertake qualitative research methods with public sector organisations responsible for promoting children and young people's participation to understand:

- the barriers facing organisations from adopting the NPS Charter and Kitemark, preventing uptake of the schemes
- the extent to which the Charter and Kitemark support organisations to deliver and embed the NPS
- the reasons why some organisations have chosen alternative frameworks or models to promote participation.

The four research objectives included:

**Objective one:** To assess the evidence from a desk-based systematic review of national and international approaches that support public sector organisations to embed and deliver quality practice at a national level. The review should follow a robust methodology to gather evidence of 'what works' for existing approaches. Evidence should be reviewed from a range of public service sectors and not limited to children and young people's participation.

**Objective two:** To use qualitative research methods to gather the views of Welsh public sector organisations' employees regarding the Charter and Kitemark. These individuals should represent organisations who are expected to promote the participation of children and young people but who have engaged with the Charter and Kitemark at different levels. The research should include organisations who have:

- adopted the Charter and gained the Kitemark award
- adopted the Charter without applying for the Kitemark
- not adopted the Charter or Kitemark.

The methods undertaken should:

- assess the public sector's awareness and knowledge of the NPS and the extent to which they are applied in practice
- explore the barriers that influence an organisation's decision not to take up the Kitemark or Charter and their reasons for adopting alternative frameworks or models
- understand the ways in which the Kitemark and/or Charter support organisations to promote and embed the NPS for children and young people in their services and practice
- identify the enablers and barriers that exist for organisations who have adopted the Charter and Kitemark.

**Objective three:** To undertake an objective analysis of the results from both the desk-based review and qualitative fieldwork to produce a combined thematic report communicating the findings, including a briefing of the preliminary findings.

**Objective four:** To summarise the findings and draw upon these to make conclusions to inform policy decisions on the future direction to the NPS Charter and Kitemark.

## **2. Methodology**

This review was structured in four stages, comprising a range of research tasks and activities. See Annex A for the analytical framework. The four stages are outlined below.

### **2.1 Stages and tasks**

#### **Stage 1: Inception and scoping**

Following an inception meeting with Welsh Government, scoping interviews were carried out with Welsh Government officials and representatives from CRAG, the All Wales Participation Workers Network (AWPWN), the Office of the Children's Commissioner for Wales and Children in Wales to establish the strategic context for children and young people's rights and participation in Wales, the role and effectiveness of the NPS Charter and Kitemark, enablers and barriers to the take-up of the NPS Charter and Kitemark and views on future options and priorities for supporting the implementation of the NPS. Interview topic guides were tailored to reflect the specific knowledge and expertise of the key stakeholders interviewed.

#### **Stage 2: Evidence review**

The review provided an assessment of the national and international evidence for what works in supporting public sector organisations to deliver and embed quality practice at national level, to identify effective features, how organisations have overcome any barriers, and what outcomes are being captured and assessed. A systematic approach was adopted, respecting the principles of a Rapid Evidence Assessment (REA). Annex B provides an overview of the evidence review protocol which the research team used to inform their search, screening and selection criteria.

#### **Stage 3: Qualitative research**

The research team carried out qualitative research with a range of stakeholders from public sector organisations, with a principal focus on representatives from Children's Services or Youth Services. Semi-structured interviews explored key opportunities and barriers facing organisations around the adoption of the NPS Charter and Kitemark and scheme uptake, and alternative approaches to promote and embed children and young people's participation. The following qualitative research sample was achieved:

- Scoping interviews (Stage 1): The researchers carried out interviews (n=5) with Welsh Government officials and representatives from CRAG, AWPWN, and Children in Wales.
- Stakeholder interviews with public sector organisations (Stage 3): The research team carried out a total 21 interviews with Local Authorities (n=18), Offices of the Police and Crime Commissioners (n=2), and University Health Boards (n=1).

#### **Stage 4: Analysis and reporting**

Interview data was summarised and written up in a framework for further data categorisation and coding, following [Braun and Clarke's \(2020\)](#) six phases of thematic analysis from data familiarisation. The evaluation team developed and shared emerging findings via a slide deck reported to Welsh Government colleagues in October 2025.

### **2.2. Recruitment of participants and ethical considerations**

Copies of data collection materials are provided in Annex D. All stakeholder-facing research materials were professionally translated into Welsh once final versions were agreed with the Welsh Government. All qualitative interviews were offered in both English and Welsh. One research participant chose to complete their interview in Welsh.

The research team led on recruitment activities, comprising an initial email inviting potential participants to take part in an interview and up to three reminder emails. Welsh Government supported by providing initial stakeholder contact details. Interviewees were sent information sheets and privacy notices in English and Welsh ahead of the interview and each researcher checked whether they understood them before starting the interview.

### **2.3 Data collection, management and analysis**

Semi-structured interview topic guides facilitated the qualitative discussions, which were conducted remotely using MS Teams. All interviews were recorded and auto transcribed, with interviewees' informed consent. Transcripts were used to write-up the interview data under the agreed thematic headings and sub-headings. All qualitative data was entered into and processed in Excel. This involved initial coding and tagging of the data using an agreed coding frame. Once qualitative data was coded, a secondary analysis stage was undertaken allowing thematic analysis against the evaluation research questions.

### **2.4 Data considerations**

Interviews with local authority stakeholders were primarily from Children's Services or Youth Services. This meant that it was not possible to explore the barriers faced across the local authority when promoting and embedding the NPS. The stakeholder views are therefore likely to present a degree of optimism bias, as public sector organisations with lower awareness or engagement are under-represented in the data.

It was not possible to interview Public Service Boards (PSBs) and Regional Partnership Boards (RPBs), as originally planned. The research team encountered challenges engaging with PSBs and RPBs during the recruitment process. Despite multiple communications from the research team and Welsh Government colleagues, it was not possible to secure interviews during the project contract period. This meant that it was not possible to gather regional level views about the implementation of the NPS and the role of the Charter and Kitemark. This also limited the ability to triangulate findings with the data collected.

### 3. Findings from the evidence review

This chapter presents the key findings from the desk research. It starts with an overview of the schemes, charters, awards and accreditations implemented in Wales and comparable countries to support organisations to embed children and young people's rights and participation. The section draws solely on the learning from schemes that have been formally reviewed and documented within the academic literature, policy studies and independent research reports. A full bibliography can be found in Annex E. The chapter considers the strength of the evidence and key characteristics of the schemes. The chapter then goes on to identify lessons learned from mainstreaming child rights-based approaches and from efficacy of charters, awards and accreditations in other sectors.

#### 3.1 Overview of schemes

The research team reviewed 48 documents, covering a range of relevant schemes. Examples of key schemes are included throughout this section, and Annex C provides a table matching these schemes with the corresponding country. Table 2 provides an overview of the coverage, while full details on the search, screening and quality criteria are presented in Annex B.

##### Overview of schemes reviewed:

- **Types of scheme:** Awards and accreditations, charter and frameworks.
- **Document type:** Academic journals, research and evaluation reports, strategy and framework reports.
- **Country of coverage:** Australia, Belgium, Canada, England, Northern Ireland, Republic of Ireland, Scotland the Unites States of America, and Wales.

Schemes reviewed focused on improving quality practice amongst organisations, including supporting organisations to embed national priorities and innovative approaches to strengthen everyday practice.

As guided by the REA protocol developed by the study team for the review, the documents meeting the threshold for inclusion were characterised by strong research designs, typically comprising large sample sizes and rigorous methodologies. They included:

- Mixed-method evaluations comprising surveys, interviews and case studies, some longitudinal data
- Systematic reviews and literature reviews and secondary analysis
- Quantitative and qualitative studies

##### 3.1.1 Models of accreditation schemes and charters

The documents reviewed revealed that most accreditation schemes adopted a tiered accreditation model. This model was typically characterised by a staged progression, such as bronze, silver or gold staged awards. Key examples include the [Quality Mark for Youth Work Award](#) and the [Young Carers in Schools \(YCiS\) Award](#). Other schemes adopted a similar staged route to accreditation with different levels. This includes examples [like Eco-](#)

[Schools' 7 step process](#), [the Welsh Network of Healthy School Schemes](#) National Quality Award and the [Welsh Language Charter](#), which include 3 levels respectively.

Accreditation schemes adopting this model were based on meeting defined standards or criteria. In some cases, this was linked to national or international frameworks (notably the UNCRC), including the Rights Respecting Schools Award, and Corporate Parenting Charter: A Promise for Wales. In this model, accreditation was achieved through a combination of self-assessment (against the set criteria) and external assessment. The self-assessment typically required participating organisations to monitor and collect data and information linked to the set criteria to present as evidence for meeting the accreditation requirements. This could include case studies to highlight good practice. External assessments provided validation and ensured credibility. These assessments were carried out by a range of stakeholders including panels of experts, and children and young people.

The [Eco-Schools programme](#) is a key example. According to Boeve-de Pauw and Van Petegem (2018), in this model, schools progressively develop and embed environmental policies, actively involve students in decision-making, and integrate sustainability into everyday activities. Accreditation is then based on meeting defined standards, with each stage representing a clear milestone. This was recognised in the literature to motivate ongoing improvement and ensure that progress is both measurable and celebrated.

In contrast, other schemes relied solely on organisations applying to the scheme and evidencing their achievement toward a set of defined standards or principles. Schemes such as the [Beacon Scheme](#) (Radnor, 2009) and the [IPAC Innovative Management Award](#) (Bernier et al., 2015) rely on formal applications from participating organisations. These applications are assessed through a combination of internal self-assessment, where organisations critically review and evidence their own practices. External validation by independent juries or panels of experts is also carried out. This dual approach can enhance credibility, provide valuable feedback, and benchmark organisational performance against sector-wide standards.

### **3.1.2 Characteristics of accreditation schemes and awards**

A key characteristic of the delivery models reviewed is the expectation that award winners will actively disseminate their good practice. For instance, Beacon councils were required to share their learning through events, site visits, and networking activities (Hartley and Downe, 2007). Similarly, IPAC finalists and winners present their achievements at national conferences, ensuring that innovative practices are publicised and available for peer learning. According to the literature, this 'recognition plus dissemination' model helps ensure that awards go beyond being tokenistic into vehicles for sector-wide improvement.

The literature indicates that being embedded into the core functions of organisations supports the recognition and adoption of schemes and awards. Those that align with broader policy frameworks, such as the [Curriculum for Wales](#) or other rights-based education, were seen as more likely to drive sustainable change, linked to the strong alignment with national policy (Rothwell et al., 2009; Children's Commissioner for Wales, 2022). The need for local flexibility within a national framework is also recognised as a

factor for success as this allows organisations to set priorities that reflect their context, making participation accessible to a wide range of population groups (Byrne et al., 2023; Public Health Wales, 2024).

## **3.2 Lessons learned from the literature**

### **3.2.1 Mainstreaming child rights-based approaches**

The literature showed that children's rights are mainstreamed more effectively when strong legal duties and organisational frameworks support them. Putting rights into national law, as the Measure does in Wales, provides a firm foundation, helping to ensure they are considered across all areas of policy and practice. Practical mechanisms, such as Children's Rights Impact Assessments, translate these legal obligations into everyday decision-making. Independent oversight by bodies such as Children's Commissioners and formal participation mechanisms like Youth Parliaments strengthen accountability and make it harder for children's rights to be overlooked in planning and governance. National frameworks also play an important role by setting shared expectations and encouraging public bodies to integrate children's rights into their work.

Furthermore, there is compelling evidence that children's rights are often more effectively mainstreamed when young people play a meaningful role in shaping and reviewing services, rather than being consulted occasionally (Duggan et al., 2020; Public Health Wales, 2024). Regular participation in planning and decision-making makes services more relevant and ensures children's views are taken seriously across organisations (Bragg and Manchester, 2011; Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2015). Such participation may strengthen accountability by ensuring that services reflect children and young people's lived experiences and priorities.

### **3.2.2 Lessons learned from other sectors**

The literature relating to other sectors highlights that that participation works best when built into the culture of educational settings, including higher education and private organisations, rather than treated as a separate activity. Integrating participation supports the development of inclusive environments where young people are consistently involved. This was often found to be a way to ensure strong engagement from children and young people.

The literature also suggests that where schemes offer funding and encourage organisations to share good practice through visits, mentoring, or networks, they work best when recognition is combined with practical support to help organisations keep developing over time.

### **3.2.3 Training, guidance, support**

A further common theme is that organisations seeking to embed good practice need sustained commitment to capacity building. Specifically, awarding bodies play a pivotal role by offering structured training, practical guidance, and ongoing support to participating organisations (Rothwell et al., 2009; Burley, 2025). This level of support is beneficial for

organisations working toward achieving an accreditation as well as for ensuring that improvements are sustained over time.

A clear example is provided by the [Rights Respecting Schools Award \(RRSA\)](#), where UNICEF UK initially delivered INSET training and development opportunities for school leaders. This was further strengthened by local authority staff who were trained to deliver the RRSA framework (Quennerstedt, 2022). During the initial implementation phase (2007–2010), funding from the Department for Education enabled schools to access professional development, training, and supply cover, ensuring staff could participate without additional strain. Following this period, local authorities maintained a baseline level of support, reflecting the ongoing nature of capacity building required to embed practice.

Other schemes, such as [Eco Schools Wales](#), demonstrate the importance of dedicated roles. Schools appointed an Eco-Coordinator, supported internally and externally by Eco-Schools Officers, to drive the programme. Similarly, the [Quality Mark for Youth Work](#) underscores the value of having designated staff responsible for leading initiatives, supported by external expertise and resources. These arrangements help to ensure that knowledge, skills, and good practice are both developed and maintained within the organisation, reducing reliance on a single individual and supporting sustainability.

The process of working towards accreditation is often characterised by the requirement to submit portfolios or evidence-based applications, where organisations demonstrate how they meet defined standards or principles. This approach encourages reflective practice, internal evaluation, and continuous improvement, all of which are supported through the guidance and feedback provided by the awarding bodies. For instance, recipients of the Beacon Council Award are expected to disseminate good practice by hosting learning events and producing resource packs, further embedding knowledge within their own organisation and sharing it more widely.

Overall, the provision of training, guidance, and ongoing support is fundamental to embedding good practice. It ensures that organisations are equipped not just to achieve recognition, but to sustain and develop their practice over time, fostering a culture of excellence and shared learning that benefits children and young people across diverse settings.

### **3.2.4 Promotion of accreditation schemes and charters**

Promoting accreditation schemes and charters was recognised as essential to raise awareness, encouraging participation from targeted organisations (Radnor, 2009; Tien, 2012; Quennerstedt, 2022). Schemes typically leveraged a range of outreach and engagement activities, through websites, professional networks, events and conferences to ensure schemes are visible to potential applicants and stakeholders. Visibility of the schemes and charters was also key. This involved strong branding and logos to help distinguish awarded organisations and signify quality (Boeve-de Pauw and Petegem, 2017).

Media and publicity were central components of many of the more successful schemes and charters, as characterised by strong coverage, government press releases, and the online publication of awardees' details. This was associated with broader recognition of the

accreditation schemes and charters. Having strong government backing and endorsement was also seen as adding legitimacy, and helped ensure alignment with national priorities, maintaining the relevance and political support of schemes.

For example, the Quality Customer Service (QCS) Mark, a kitemark that recognises excellence in quality customer service across the Irish public service, was heavily promoted through distinct national branding, public awareness campaigns and annual high-profile events. Winning organisations would be able to display the QCS Mark logo on their stationery, websites and communications, giving them public recognition as leaders in customer service.

Indeed, the literature highlights that holding award ceremonies and events are key to help celebrate achievements and spotlighting good practice. Findings from the literature indicate that this helps to position awards as badges of excellence and serves as a mark of credibility for funders, partners, clients, and the wider public (Rosenblatt, 2011; Education Workforce Council, 2024). Similarly, many schemes also use professional networks and conferences where recipients of accreditation schemes showcase their practices and success stories. This was seen as a way to encourage other organisations to buy-in to the schemes (Watkins and Beschel, 2010).

Overall, the promotional strategies for accreditation schemes rely on high visibility, strong media presence, government endorsement, and active showcasing of success stories. These collective approaches help foster credibility, motivate improvement, and help embed a culture of excellence and shared learning amongst organisations.

### **3.2.5 Motivation and buy-in**

Sustaining meaningful culture change within organisations requires a long-term commitment to embedding children's rights at every level. Evidence indicates that successful mainstreaming depends on cultivating a shared organisational ethos that recognises children as rights holders, underpinned by strong leadership, regular workforce training, and alignment of internal values and practices with child rights principles (Mesie, 2018). However, competing priorities, such as involvement in multiple schemes, local policy mismatches, post-pandemic recovery, and increasing operational costs, can strain staff capacity and reduce the relevance or appeal of participation in award schemes (Byrne et al., 2023; Education Workforce Council, 2014; Public Health Wales, 2025).

However, there is also a risk that engagement with accreditation schemes becomes superficial, with some organisations seeking recognition primarily for prestige rather than genuine improvement (Sebba and Robinson, 2010). When awards are distributed too frequently or without clear merit, their value may be diminished, leading to resentment and undermining buy-in. The evidence suggests that to achieve lasting culture change, organisations must move beyond symbolic gestures and ensure that motivation for participation is rooted in enhancing practice and upholding children's rights, rather than collecting accolades (Watkins and Beschel, 2010).

### 3.3 Best practice and conclusions

The literature underlines the important role of award schemes in embedding participation within the everyday culture of organisations, especially those working with children and young people. Rather than treating participation as a one-off or isolated activity, integrating it into core organisational practices fosters genuinely inclusive environments where children and young people are consistently involved in shaping their services and experiences. This approach leads to sustained and meaningful engagement, rather than timebound consultation.

Good practice is characterised by the creation of meaningful opportunities for children and young people's participation. For instance, youth councils and ambassador programmes offer regular forums for children and young people to raise issues, exercise leadership, and directly influence decisions. These structures can empower children and young people to make tangible contributions and promoting a sense of ownership and agency.

Award and accreditation schemes were commonly recognised as key drivers of improvement (Sebba and Robinson, 2014; Quennerstedt, 2022; Education Workforce Council, 2024; Public Health Wales, 2024). Schemes that set out clear standards and provide constructive feedback, typically support organisations in identifying areas for growth. Where funding is linked to these schemes, it often enables activities such as mentoring, peer visits, and the sharing of best practice through professional networks. The most successful schemes combine recognition with ongoing practical support, helping organisations to maintain momentum and continue developing over time.

Shared learning was another widely documented aspect of effective practice. The research indicates that organisational improvement tends to be more apparent when there are opportunities to learn from peers, such as through events and mentoring networks (Watkins and Beschel, 2010; Rosenblatt, 2011; Bernier et al., 2015). These activities can facilitate the sharing of ideas and proven approaches, help build staff confidence, and raise overall standards workforces and sectors.

Continual self-assessment and evidence-based reflection were also found to be essential to the effective maintenance of schemes. Tools such as self-evaluation frameworks, 'deep dive' checklists, and evidence-based toolkits often enable organisations to review their participation practices, identify strengths and gaps, and plan targeted improvements (Education Workforce Council, 2024; Burley, 2025; Public Health Wales, 2025). This structured approach ensures that changes are based on real information and supports ongoing, consistent enhancement of practice.

The literature further indicates that award schemes tended to be more impactful where they provide opportunities for all children and young people, including those with disabilities, young carers, or those who may need additional support, to be involved in the assessment process. Practical measures might include adapting activities, providing anonymous feedback mechanisms, or offering tailored support to ensure everyone can contribute (Bragg and Manchester, 2011; Sebba and Robinson, 2014; Quennerstedt, 2022). Through

prioritising inclusion, organisations were often able to build confidence and ensure that children and young people's voices were valued and heard without the fear of stigma.

An illustrative example of these principles in action is the Welsh Network of Healthy Schools Scheme (WNHSS). This nationally led, locally delivered initiative embeds health promotion and meaningful pupil participation into school practice. Schools progress through structured phases with guidance from local coordinators and support from national training and resources. School councils play a central role, ensuring that children and young people have real influence. The scheme has demonstrated improvements in behaviour, built staff capacity, and embedded health promotion into the overall school ethos.

In summary, good practice in mainstreaming award schemes and charters targeted at public bodies is underpinned by a holistic, inclusive, and evidence-based approach. The examples shared in this section show how schemes have contributed to integrating participation into organisational culture, providing meaningful opportunities, supporting learning and reflection, and ensuring inclusion collectively drive positive change and sustained improvement for children and young people.

## 4. Findings from NPS Charter and Kitemark review

This chapter presents the key findings from the public sector stakeholder interviews, supplemented by key findings from the scoping interviews. It should be read in the context of the study's data limitations and caveats. In particular, local authority stakeholders were primarily drawn from Children's Services or Youth Services, which meant it was not possible to explore the full range of barriers faced across local authorities when promoting and embedding the NPS.

The chapter begins with an overview of the level of awareness and views of the NPS. It also provides a discussion about how the NPS have been implemented in practice and the role of the NPS Charter and Kitemark, including the key barriers public sector organisations face in embedding them. The chapter concludes with an overview of stakeholders' views about how to improve the NPS Charter and Kitemark and considers alternative tools and approaches.

### 4.1 Awareness and knowledge of the NPS

This section provides important context for the findings discussed in this chapter. This includes the level of awareness of the NPS across stakeholders interviewed, views and perceptions of the 7 standards.

#### 4.1.1 Awareness and communication

Communication and visibility of the NPS across organisations varied amongst the public sector organisations interviewed. Local Authority Children's Services and Youth Services typically led on raising awareness across their workforce, for example by placing posters and materials in offices. While this was seen as a good way to improve visibility of the NPS, one Local Authority stakeholder was cautious that the NPS could end up "being a poster on the wall in a youth centre", emphasising that there is a need to go beyond this.

'Other than us putting up posters around the youth service... I don't necessarily think it's as far wide [Sic] understood.' – Local authority stakeholder

Few public sector organisations reported that the NPS were widely known across their workforce particularly beyond Children's and Youth Services, and increasing awareness was a common priority. Securing support from senior management was seen as crucial for maintaining top-down commitment, though stakeholders reported mixed levels of senior level buy in. Turnover at senior levels was viewed as a risk to sustaining momentum, with scoping interview findings suggesting that departures can lead to reduced focus on children and young people's participation unless incoming leaders champion the NPS.

#### 4.1.2 Views on the 7 NPS

Stakeholders interviewed generally agreed that the seven standards are clear, coherent and achievable, and valued their co-production with children and young people.

'I think the standards are clear. I think our staff understand them and work to them.' – Local authority stakeholder

Some noted that certain standards were easier to evidence than others; for example, some stakeholders noted that Standard 6 (Feedback) was challenging to meet due to inconsistent or limited feedback loops. One stakeholder also questioned whether children and young people were informed about how their feedback and contributions were used. Standard 3 (No discrimination) was also considered difficult for organisations whose services do not always recognise the diversity among children and young people or adapt delivery accordingly. Overall, interviewees agreed that the Standards acknowledge that different children and young people have different needs, though a minority felt a more differentiated approach may be required to demonstrate effective implementation for diverse groups.

### **4.1.3 Views on local authorities' responsibilities**

Local authority stakeholders were asked to reflect on their statutory duty to promote and embed children and young people's participation and widely agreed that local authorities should champion the NPS in line with this duty. Specifically, they were asked about adopting the NPS to meet this duty (see 'Introduction and background').

In practice, the standards appear to be well embedded across participating local authorities, specifically in Children and Youth Services within this study's scope, and were viewed as a useful benchmark for children and young people's participation practice.

'We need to make sure that right from the beginning, if you're coming to work with [local authority], you know what they are and you're aware of them [NPS]. And that way you can work with young people.' – Local authority stakeholder

However, there was some variation in interpretation and application at operational level; some described the standards as a minimum baseline for practice. However, they noted there is no statutory requirement or guideline around resource allocation (such as staffing levels) to support implementation. Concerns were also raised about inconsistent implementation across departments due to a lack of robust audit or accountability mechanisms.

Overall, while statutory obligations were acknowledged and broadly supported, stakeholders emphasised the need for clearer guidance, improved monitoring, and greater consistency across local authorities.

## **4.2 Embedding the NPS**

In line with the finding that children and young people's rights and participation commonly sit within Local Authority Children's Services and Youth Services, the implementation of the NPS typically sat with dedicated participation teams or participation managers and officers. In other public sector organisations, responsibilities similarly rested with teams and professionals with specific designated responsibilities for engaging children and young people.

Embedding the NPS within children and young people participation strategies and accompanying delivery and action plans was common across Local Authority Children's and Youth Services. This included a reduction strategy for Looked After Children in one local

authority. However, the extent to which the 7 NPS were explicitly referenced varied. This may suggest an inconsistent approach across local authorities in how the NPS are acknowledged and embedded within Children and Youth services.

Children and young people's participation strategies were often aligned with wider local authority visions for citizen engagement and drew on additional frameworks such as UNICEF's 'Child Friendly Cities' and 'The Right Way Approach' led by the Children's Commissioner for Wales, reflecting the range of approaches used to shape service delivery. Some stakeholders also noted that these strategies were co-produced with children and young people.

#### **4.2.1 Monitoring the NPS**

A varied picture emerged regarding how public sector organisations monitor children and young people's participation, inclusive of the NPS. In some cases, organisations have established processes and structured approaches to monitor the implementation of the NPS. However, other organisations lack these formal systems or have informal mechanisms (such as collecting anecdotal evidence) or expressed uncertainty around effective monitoring methods, highlighting a desire for clearer guidance in this area.

Where monitoring was in place, it was often linked to participation strategies and action plans, with common activities including progress tracking, self-evaluation and gathering feedback from children and young people.

Collecting feedback was widely recognised as essential for effective monitoring. Examples of this included referral tracking, inspections, project evaluations, consultations and youth forums, which helped identify both service strengths and groups that were harder to engage. Some local authorities used annual service reporting or team plan reviews to evidence NPS implementation.

A few local authorities also leveraged annual reporting of their Children or Youth Service, as a key tool for evidencing NPS implementation. In one local authority, annual reviews of team plans are carried out to ensure activities are aligned with NPS requirements, utilising a comprehensive approach to monitor a spectrum of relevant activities throughout the year.

'I do an annual report on how it's embedded. Some of that then we do a sweep across all of the team plans to ensure that there's activities that relate to it [NPS]...There's quite a wide spectrum there, of activities, but they're all monitored via our planning and our timetables that we set out set out for the year.' – Local authority stakeholder

However, the absence of formal auditing processes at the local authority level and the lack of a national framework for benchmarking implementation were seen by some as contributing to inconsistencies in monitoring practices. A local authority stakeholder emphasised how this gap makes it difficult to compare implementation between local authorities. In other cases, monitoring was viewed as inconsistent across different local authority services with youth services perhaps understandably seen as having stronger systems for participation than other service areas.

These findings point to a need for more robust and standardised data collection, clearer impact measurement, and national guidance to support consistent monitoring and accountability.

#### **4.2.2 Views on mainstreaming across organisations**

Stakeholders interviewed agreed that the NPS should be mainstreamed across public sector organisations, including services that do not directly work with children and young people, but where participation would still be valuable. Indeed, several Local Authority stakeholders interviewed indicated a desire for the NPS to be recognised and embedded within other services. This includes services that may not directly work with children and young people, but where their participation would be valued.

The promotion of the NPS throughout public sector organisations was seen as a crucial first step to improving the visibility of the NPS across service lines. This sentiment was echoed in scoping interviews, which highlighted the need for better communication on the resources available to support organisations to embed children's rights and participation. Local Authority stakeholders interviewed emphasised the need for all services to understand their responsibilities and acknowledge the value of children and young people in shaping services and policies.

'Actually, it's a responsibility across the board if you're out there delivering a service. It's just about other people understanding their responsibilities and their duties, and how powerful that voice of a young person is.' – Local authority stakeholder

Our findings indicate that the NPS are not currently being mainstreamed across the public sector organisations interviewed. One local authority described establishing dedicated 'child's rights' champions across service lines who would take the lead on coordinating the implementation of the NPS within their service. Having this role in place was seen as facilitating cross-service meetings to promote a shared organisational responsibility for upholding children's rights and participation, with the aim of increasing buy-in and capacity for participation work across the organisation. However, barriers included limited capacity in services that do not traditionally engage with children and young people and perceptions that participation was not relevant to certain areas of work.

Overall, the findings highlight a strong support for mainstreaming the NPS across organisations but indicate practical barriers that are currently preventing them from doing so. The findings suggest a need for further work to embed consistent, meaningful children and young people's participation throughout services, where appropriate. This includes raising awareness of the benefits of children and young people's participation and their right to be heard, ensuing buy-in from different services, and building their capacity to engage. The specific role of the NPS Charter and Kitemark in addressing these challenges is considered in further detail in Section 4.3 below.

### **4.2.3 Role of NPS in enhancing children and young people's participation**

There is clear evidence that the NPS serves as a benchmark and reference point for children and young people's participation across public sector organisations. Interviewees described how the standards have strengthened participation strategies, improved service delivery and embedded youth voice in decision making. Local authorities reported that the NPS contributed to stronger delivery plans, refining service delivery, embedding youth voice in decision-making processes, and more systematic approaches to collecting and responding to young people's feedback.

'Our plans are improved because of it [NPS]. Our activities are stronger. You know that we're able to say absolutely that young people have helped us design the services that affect them'. – Local authority stakeholder

The NPS have helped identify gaps in service delivery, and prompted targeted actions to address weaknesses. The NPS have also supported the development of stronger delivery models that reflect young people's needs. Specifically, stakeholders interviewed observed that youth voice is better prioritised throughout service design and implementation.

Staff awareness and understanding of the NPS have been enhanced through induction and training within some Youth Services and Children's Services. Although strategic level recognition of the NPS was less consistent, some examples showed how engagement with the NPS supported senior leaders to champion participation more effectively.

Overall, the interview evidence suggests that the NPS have played a crucial role in driving improvements in children and young people's participation across local authorities interviewed. They provide a clear framework for evaluating and refining participation strategies, foster greater staff awareness, and support the development of youth-led service models.

## **4.3 NPS Charter and Kitemark**

This sub-section outlines the findings related to the NPS Charter and Kitemark. Some findings apply to the Charter and the Kitemark collectively, while other findings are specific to either the Charter or the Kitemark. The low take-up of the Charter and Kitemark should be considered when reviewing the findings outlined here.

There were mixed levels of familiarity with the NPS Charter and Kitemark across the public sector organisations interviewed. This was largely linked to their level of engagement with the Charter and/or the Kitemark to date. For instance, organisations that have not previously signed up to the Charter were unlikely to know about either scheme. One local authority stakeholder highlighted how they could not find any information on the Kitemark online.

### **4.3.1 Motivations and uptake**

Wanting to demonstrate strong commitment toward children and young people's participation externally was a key pull factor for public sector organisations to buy-in to the Charter and Kitemark schemes. Local authorities commonly perceived the Charter and Kitemark as beneficial to highlight to other organisations their good work in this field.

‘It’s a signal to your own service and to other services about your intentionality and your purpose’. – Local authority stakeholder

For instance, being able to include the Kitemark in email signatures to demonstrate commitment and achievement of the NPS was noted by one local authority stakeholder as a motivator.

The Charter was perceived by some interviewees as beneficial for engaging with strategic-level stakeholders within local authorities as it provided a credible framework to support children and young people’s participation. This advantage, coupled with having strong government backing and oversight from Children in Wales, had helped to raise the Charter’s kudos and visibility.

‘The main motivator for us was that we recognised when you’re going to go and talk to strategic officers from multiple areas that you do need something to pin that to. To go: okay, here’s what we think is an acceptable set of standards that is recognised by the Welsh Government, and Children in Wales is a recognised body helping you with that process and overseeing it.’ – Local authority stakeholder

The Charter and Kitemark were seen as potential mechanisms for children and young people to hold organisations to account. Indeed, some interviewees highlighted the role of each scheme in supporting them to provide value for children and young people. It was seen as important for children and young people to be fully aware of their participation rights, as this awareness enables them to hold the local authority to account.

‘All of these things that we put in place, actually, if young people understand them and own them themselves, they can hold us to account for it. That will be our biggest push factor to it, because it means something to them.’ – Local authority stakeholder

Interviewees typically expressed stronger (positive or negative) views on the Charter than the Kitemark. Some local authority stakeholders linked this to the Kitemark’s current hiatus. Some felt the hiatus had impacted their plans to evidence and implement the NPS, although in practical terms, it would still be possible for them to continue without an award.

#### **4.3.2 Requirements**

The Charter sign up process was considered straightforward, and the requirements deemed appropriate. Interviewees said that participation is already a fundamental part of their work, so signing up to the Charter felt easy and “natural”. One local authority that previously held the Charter and Kitemark suggested that providing evidence toward meeting the NPS should be part of the Charter process.

‘I’m not saying that the Charter needs to be anywhere near the level of the Kitemark, but somewhere that’s perhaps ensuring that organisations are already on that journey.’ – Local authority stakeholder

The Kitemark application, however, was described as being a more onerous process. Local authorities that previously held Kitemark status described it as being resource intensive, while acknowledging the need for a robust process. The self-assessment element of the Kitemark was described as lengthy, but a valuable exercise nonetheless.

‘The self-evaluation process that comes with it was lengthy, but it felt really useful because it makes you reflect honestly – can you tick all of those boxes and say that you do all aspects of participation on specific topics? So I think it’s quite an intense process and quite time consuming. But I would say quite valuable.’ – Local authority stakeholder

Furthermore, it was also suggested that the time commitment required for the self-assessment may be a deterrent for moving from obtaining the Charter to applying for the Kitemark. Also, the process of going from the Charter to the Kitemark should be streamlined.

‘Because of the time commitment that’s needed, it might put some organisations off applying for it [Kitemark], and that might be why they stay in that sort of Charter loop’. – Local authority stakeholder

Local authorities generally praised the support that they received from Children in Wales during the application process, which included regular check-ins. They also highlighted how the Kitemark is aligned with other quality systems in Wales, such as Estyn inspections and the Quality Mark for Youth Work, providing consistency. However, it was reported that there is a need for better integration and less duplication across inspection systems. It was suggested that this could be achieved by aligning the evidence required to achieve the Kitemark with existing frameworks and awards. Furthermore, it was noted how it would be good to have a clearer explanation of the assessment and interview process beforehand, to know what to expect. An easy template was suggested for applicants to follow, to make the process smoother and to ensure that local authorities are clear on what is expected of them.

Evidence on monitoring mechanisms for the Charter and Kitemark was more limited. One local authority suggested the development of a consistent national auditing or monitoring system, to ensure accountability and enable comparison across organisations holding the Kitemark.

‘There’s currently no audit. It would be interesting to identify what services are actually promoting it, who should be doing more.’ – Local authority stakeholder

Most interviewees noted that they did not have formal monitoring processes in place, but some integrated evidence of meeting statutory duties into their routine reporting.

### **4.3.3 Value of the Charter and Kitemark**

There were mixed views on the value of the Charter and Kitemark as tools to promote children and young people’s participation and demonstrate a commitment. The Charter was commonly recognised to be a valuable tool in the promotion of the NPS, specifically as a way for an organisation to acknowledge that they were embedding the standards. Local

authorities interviewed valued being able to showcase the positive work that they have been doing within the participation space, and how they have set a good baseline for children and young people's participation within their local authority.

'I think it is fit for purpose. It has certainly worked for us as an organisation to open those conversations and to have a point of reference to have those conversations with senior strategic groups. It sets a baseline.' – Local authority stakeholder

The main reported benefits of the Charter and Kitemark were that they reinforce high-quality practice, encourage reflection and action on what participation means and how it might be achieved. One local authority that previously held the Charter and the Kitemark noted how both schemes had strengthened professional credibility within and beyond the Council. Other local authorities saw the Charter a means of validating investment in young people, as it signalled the positive work that organisations were carrying out. Unexpected benefits reported included improved internal communication and more systematic evidence collection.

However, it was suggested that the Charter would be more beneficial if it had concrete actions attached to it, which supports a finding presented in [section 4.3.2](#). One local authority interviewed suggested an action plan would be a useful tool alongside the Charter to support organisations to have something to work towards.

Other organisations who had taken up the Charter found it to be a helpful tool to encourage organisations to complete self-assessments and action plans, in an attempt to embed meaningful participation in all aspects of their work.

Interviewees also valued that the Young Inspectors were involved in the Kitemark process. This was seen as a crucial element of the Kitemark as it ensures that organisations are held to account by the beneficiaries of their work. The Young Inspector role was seen as providing reassurance to external organisations that participation is genuine rather than tokenistic and strengthens credibility.

'You're going to get so much value from young people coming and giving you feedback on the model...It's young people themselves and they're getting involved, they're being heard, they're feeding directly into the processes of how that's operated. It's just great and I'm just like, well, that's such a good model.' – Local authority stakeholder

Those organisations who had not applied for Charter or Kitemark status commonly thought that there was insufficient appeal to warrant the time and resource it would take to apply. Interviewees were committed to, and believed in, meaningful participation, but some did not deem it necessary to dedicate resource in order to showcase this.

'Do we consider it would give us enough value in terms of either confidence that we're achieving this, or credibility with other local authorities or all those kinds of things against the amount of time it would take?' – Local authority stakeholder

Some local authorities who did not hold Charter or Kitemark status, however, believed that it would be a good thing for their local authority to take forward. They noted that it would help them to evidence and benchmark their commitment to the NPS.

‘That would help us benchmark and evidence that we are listening to children and young people and that we are acknowledging their rights and it’s embedded in practice, which I think is really important for us as a local authority.’ – Local authority stakeholder

Overall, the findings indicate that the Charter and Kitemark processes can be valuable tools for fostering meaningful participation, though stakeholders varied in how strongly they viewed their benefits and effectiveness. The schemes are perceived to enhance professional credibility within organisations that buy-in to them. They encourage reflective practice, drive positive action, and serve as important points of reference for strategic discussions. While there are clear benefits for both organisations, and children and young people, including increased influence and confidence, there is also a recognised need for greater visibility, clearer communication, and the inclusion of concrete actions to support ongoing development. The involvement of Young Inspectors is particularly valued, ensuring accountability and genuine engagement, but further work is needed to address concerns and maximise the impact of these initiatives.

## **4.4 Strengthening the NPS Charter and Kitemark**

### **4.4.1 Improving promotion and messaging**

There was a general consensus amongst public sector stakeholders interviewed that the NPS Charter and Kitemark require stronger promotion and messaging. This view was supported by scoping interviews as a key theme was the need to increase the visibility of the standards overall, and greater promotion of the Charter and Kitemark schemes. This was seen as a potential way to boost uptake amongst organisations.

‘It would be good to know how the Kitemark is being promoted outside the local authorities etc. We understand the importance but do other people in the community at large know what the Kitemark means? We wanted to put it on our emails...but would anyone know what it is?’ – Local authority stakeholder

Specifically, local authority stakeholders interviewed expressed an interest in accessing up to date information about the NPS as well as the Charter and Kitemark. Hosting events to celebrate organisations that commit to the Charter and achieve the Kitemark was another suggestion to improve visibility of the Charter and Kitemark. This would involve opportunities to share good practice and promote the NPS and provide further incentive to take up the schemes.

### **4.4.2 Guidance, support and training**

A need for clear, consistent, and practical guidance was a common theme across the interviews. Having ongoing national-level support was of key importance, particularly for local authorities. This was linked to local authorities’ statutory duty to promote and embed

the NPS. Specifically, local authority stakeholders interviewed noted that they would benefit from clearer guidance about expectations for funding, time, and resources needed to embed the NPS. Key suggestions offered include:

- Providing a toolkit (with checklists, reporting templates, and examples of good practice) that sets out exactly what organisations need to do to meet the standards. This could make it easier for busy teams and departments to understand and implement the standards, as well as ensure consistency and sustainability across teams.
- Training for participation officers about the Charter and Kitemark processes, so that this knowledge is embedded within the role and connected to the national network.

Interviewees also noted the role of Children in Wales in providing ongoing support to organisations that take-up the schemes. One suggestion provided was that Children in Wales could facilitate peer learning opportunities for organisations that are working towards the Kitemark. A buddying system was also suggested, whereby organisations that have achieved the Charter or Kitemark support their peers through the process. However, it was acknowledged that this may not be possible due to capacity constraints.

One public sector organisation highlighted the difference in context that should be considered for organisations who are not local authorities when applying for the Charter or Kitemark. They suggested that it would be good to have a 'link person' who understands the area of business of the organisation, to support them specifically around their organisation's duties and help them to meet the standards within their context.

'Much more is needed in the way of guidance that would help organisations interpret those standards through the lens of the work that they do and the young people that they serve.' – Public body stakeholder

Similarly, one local authority suggested that there needs to be more support for public sector organisations, and teams or departments within those organisations, that do not regularly interact with young people. They would benefit from greater support, skills and training to embed children and young people's participation as part of their service. This would help to ensure that the responsibility does not fall solely on designated participation leads but instead becomes embedded in broader service delivery.

These suggestions were commonly underpinned by a perceived need for resources to better support organisations to meaningfully embed the NPS and evidence their achievements through the Kitemark process. Indeed, capacity was highlighted as a key barrier to this work by many interviewees, with participation work often falling to already overstretched staff to manage on top of a range of other responsibilities.

'Funding should be framed around the standards, so that organisations automatically understand there is power in this and there is value.' – Local authority stakeholder

Capacity constraints were particularly evident in local authorities without dedicated participation officers. Here, a greater need was identified for support at a national level, to

ensure that organisations lacking internal capacity for participation are guided to achieve the standards. It was also suggested that Welsh Government should be clearer as to what is expected from organisations in terms of time and resource dedicated to participation, to ensure that adequate internal resource is provided locally by the organisation.

#### **4.4.3 Considerations for the Young Inspectors role**

As reported in section [4.3.3](#), the role of Young Inspectors as part of the Kitemark process was valued by interviewees. Importantly, scoping interviews and public sector stakeholder interviews highlight that this role is crucial for holding organisations to account. However, concerns were raised around the under-representation of children and young people who are less likely to participate, including those with English as a second language, learning difficulties, and children and young people at risk of exclusion.

‘I think the diversity of those young people... I think that's really important as well, that children from all walks of experience, of life to be able to challenge the services in the right ways.’ – Local authority stakeholder

One public sector organisation highlighted the importance of appointing and supporting children and young people as Young Inspectors but equally thought there should be independent scrutiny from adult professionals to prevent organisations from presenting a misleading picture. However, this was balanced with views that children and young people's capacity to engage in the Kitemark process needs to be better considered. The Young Inspector role was perceived as a role that requires significant capacity and resource to be well carried out. Yet, there is a need to consider how children and young people can manage this role alongside their commitments to school, work, social life, and self-care, while maintaining representation from youth with diverse needs and circumstances.

#### **4.4.4 Other tools and approaches**

Public sector organisations interviewed reported drawing on a range of tools and approaches to strengthen their children and young people participation work. As reported in section [4.2](#), the NPS are commonly seen as being part of a broad landscape of children and young people people's rights in Wales. As an extension of this, the NPS Charter and Kitemark can also be seen as being part of a set of tools and approaches that organisations buy-in to, to improve their practice around children and young people's participation.

The review identified a range of alternative schemes, including the [UNICEF Child Friendly Cities Initiative](#), [Children's Commissioner's The Right Way Approach](#), the [Quality Mark for Youth Work](#), the [Corporate Parenting Charter](#), and locally developed schemes.

The reasons for adopting these schemes instead of the NPS Charter and Kitemark were locally specific. In some instances, Local Authorities had appraised the options and considered other schemes to be a better fit for their local context. For example, one local authority stakeholder noted that their local youth charter was viewed as more beneficial than membership of a national scheme, due to the greater flexibility to make changes to address evolving needs:

'The local charter...we have is probably more impactful for our service users and we can relate to it as an organisation: This is what we're going to do. This is how we're going to do it. This is what you can expect from us.' – Local authority stakeholder

In other cases, the hiatus to the NPS Charter and Kitemark scheme was a factor, and local authorities reported having adopted alternative approaches to avoid a loss of momentum while take-up of the scheme was not an option. In some instances, the NPS Charter and Kitemark was delivered in tandem with, instead of as an alternative to, other tools and frameworks. For example, the Kitemark is cross-referenced within The Right Way as one of several tools available to organisations to support their work in championing children's rights.

Whatever the reason for selecting alternative schemes, interviewees reported that they adopt the tools, frameworks and principles (which includes children and young people's participation) promoted by these schemes to inform their practice. For example, one local authority has prioritised the UNICEF's Child Friendly Cities Initiative, which is designed to embed children's rights as outlined in the UNCRC, in the local context. A dedicated cross-departmental Child-Friendly Cities team coordinates child participation across departments and works particularly closely with Children's Services. It was noted during interviews that mandatory training for staff across all services has helped to raise the profile and awareness of children and young people's participation across the board.

The Children's Commissioner's The Right Way approach was also among the examples of schemes in local use. Where this had been adopted, local authority stakeholders were supportive of the model as a framework to support them to raise awareness of children and young people's rights, and particularly to support staff to embed participation within their practice.

'It [The Right Way approach] made sure that all our teams were embedding their plans. So, I think it was quite useful for us, but I think any tool that's consistently used is welcomed by us because it's going back to that point of reference all the time, isn't it? Of being able to kind of go: Here's the standard, here's our expectation.' – Local authority stakeholder

Scoping interviews provide further insight into how The Right Way approach can support organisations. Organisations that adopt the 5 principles of the approach receive practical advice, including a toolkit and a self-assessment tool to aid implementation. Training is also tailored to different sectors, making it adaptable and relevant across contexts. One scoping interview stakeholder noted that these elements have been well received by public bodies.

The Quality Mark for Youth Work was also mentioned by some local authorities as being a positive framework that they use to embed children and young people's participation, due to its external validation and promotional benefits. However, it was noted how the cost and staffing requirements for some of these alternative schemes can make them less accessible to smaller or resource-constrained authorities.

Where local authorities have adopted and often prioritised other schemes over the NPS Charter and Kitemark, stakeholders often expressed that this has created duplication of work. For example, local authorities that have adopted the UNICEF Child Friendly City, the Youth Service Quality Mark and Estyn inspection frameworks noted the need to repeatedly produce evidence that overlaps with the requirements of the NPS Charter and Kitemark. They suggested that this can stretch resources and create unnecessary repetition and highlighted the need for streamlining and better alignment across systems.

Overall, the findings highlight both the benefits of diverse approaches and the challenges of resource strain, pointing to a clear need for greater alignment and streamlining.

## 5. Conclusions

This report has drawn on evidence from literature and key stakeholder interviews to consider the efficacy of charters, accreditation schemes and awards for public sector organisations, and to assess levels of awareness of the NPS Charter and Kitemark specifically; identifying factors that support or inhibit take-up and their desirability alongside other local models. This project builds on preparatory research undertaken by Welsh Government in 2024, with the support of Children in Wales, which found low levels of take up of the Charter and Kitemark.

In this chapter, we conclude on the overall findings. The conclusions should be read in the context of the data limitations and caveats for the study. In particular, local authority stakeholders were primarily from Children's Services or Youth Services. This meant that it was not possible to explore the barriers faced across local authorities when promoting and embedding the NPS. The stakeholder views are therefore likely to present a degree of optimism bias, as public sector organisations with lower awareness or engagement with the NPS are under-represented in the data.

**Aim 1: To review evidence surrounding the efficacy of charters, accreditation schemes and awards in supporting organisations to embed national approaches in practice. This aspect of the research will synthesise key literature to understand the characteristics of the most effective approaches within the public sector.**

The review has affirmed kitemarks and awards schemes to have an important role to play in incentivising and supporting public sector organisations to embed national or international standards. There is an established precedent for these approaches relating to child rights and children's wellbeing specifically, and in servicing wider areas of public policy. While schemes with a focus on children have a specific legal dimension, usually grounded in the UNCRC, effective schemes in the public sector have a number of characteristics that are somewhat generalisable across the examples in the literature.

Effective models of awards schemes and accreditation:

- Are anchored in a clear set of measurable criteria
- Are visible, actively publicised, and widely recognised
- Signify high quality, and have an aspirational element
- Hold organisations to account with proportionate monitoring and evaluation
- Make use of benchmarks and milestones to gauge improvement
- Combine self-assessment and external assessment to validate progress
- Reward efforts to achieve and maintain accredited status
- Celebrate and disseminate success and share good practices

The qualities of being both 'measurable and celebrated' and 'recognition plus dissemination' were common to the successful examples within the literature. These elements can help to avoid tokenism, by making visible and holding public sector organisations to account both vertically to Government and horizontally to their peers within the sector.

The literature also underlines the importance of establishing the right conditions and infrastructure that allow kitemarks and awards schemes to thrive. Impactful schemes were embedded within the core functions of public sector organisations and aligned with other standards or duties that were central to their mandate. Endorsement by senior managers, the designation of internal ‘champions’ or advocates, and training and awareness raising for the workforce were all important elements to safeguard schemes against the effects of staff turnover and shifting organisational priorities over time.

Schemes with a national brand often combined endorsement at a policy level with arms-length implementation through a delivery partner to maintain independence. In most of the examples, awarding bodies played a pivotal role by offering structured training, practical guidance, and ongoing support to participating organisations, as well as maintaining communities of practice or professional networks to facilitate shared learning.

In the case of awards and kitemarks focussed on children specifically, mature schemes were generally supported by practical toolkits, such as Children’s Rights Impact Assessments, to help translate legal obligations into everyday decision-making. These schemes extended accountability from funders and awarding bodies to accountability to children and young people and reflected the needs of children with diverse needs and characteristics. They often provided mechanisms for children to participate in the design, implementation and governance of the schemes through representative structures.

**Aim 2: To undertake qualitative methods with public sector organisations responsible for promoting children and young people’s participation to understand:**

- **the barriers facing organisations from adopting the NPS Charter and Kitemark, preventing uptake of the schemes**
- **the extent to which the Charter and Kitemark support organisations to deliver and embed the NPS**
- **the reasons why some organisations have chosen alternative frameworks or models to promote participation.**

**National Participation Standards (NPS)**

The review found a high level of endorsement of the Standards among public sector staff taking part in the research. They were generally viewed as being clear, achievable, and relevant, and providing a benchmark for children and young people’s participation across Wales. Where fully implemented, stakeholders noted the contribution of the NPS in strengthening local participation strategies, refining service delivery, and embedding youth voice in decision-making processes. This is especially the case within participating local authority Youth Services and Children’s Services. The designation of responsibility for the NPS to participation workers, supported by training and awareness raising has clearly provided a valuable focal point for local implementation, while the participation workers network has connected practices at an all-Wales level.

Despite these strengths, stakeholders were less confident in the reach of the NPS beyond local authority departments and services with direct responsibilities for engagement with children and young people. Visibility and awareness of the NPS was thought to vary considerably among the wider workforce, along with variations in the perceived level of support among senior leaders. These challenges were also reflected among the other types of public sector organisations responding to the review, with a recognition that there are marked differences in the steps needed to embed the NPS across a large local authority compared with smaller organisations, specific individual local authority services, or charities.

While some local authorities have rallied around the Standards, there was a perceived need for more direction and guidance on how to build capacity within public sector organisations to adopt the NPS, including where levels of awareness and experience of supporting children's participation are low. It was also felt that Welsh Government could exert a stronger challenge to local authorities to evidence how they are promoting and facilitating children and young people's participation, beyond voluntary participation in local or national schemes, while acknowledging that the responsibility for implementation sits with local authorities.

### **Role of the NPS Charter and Kitemark**

The NPS Charter and Kitemark were generally viewed favourably by respondents as one of a number of mechanisms to support the implementation of the NPS. Among the 'already engaged' public sector organisations, the Charter and Kitemark was seen as beneficial in getting children and young people's participation on the radar of other organisations and adding weight to local efforts to implement the NPS through a branded scheme backed by the Welsh Government and Children in Wales. It offered potential extra leverage with stakeholders by demonstrating that the organisation had pledged a commitment to the NPS and reassuring that there was a recognised process for implementation. The clarity of the Charter and simplicity of the application process were viewed positively in this regard.

Where organisations had previously held the Charter and Kitemark, tangible benefits included strengthened professional credibility when advocating for children's rights and participation with other stakeholders, and consolidation and reinforcement of high-quality practice. While requiring a significant time commitment, the evidence requirements for the Kitemark had the benefit of encouraging critical self-reflection and had prompted action to address gaps in NPS implementation.

Stakeholders highlighted the importance of the Young Inspector role in the NPS Charter and Kitemark process, noting that it provides visible accountability, but they also expressed concerns about the limited ongoing participation at local level beyond the challenge provided by the Young Inspector teams.

Beyond these examples, the review found mixed levels of awareness of the NPS Kitemark and Charter among public sector organisations who took part in the research. In some instances, the organisation had previously held the Charter or Kitemark but responsibilities resided within a different team or department, or there had been staffing turnover. This meant that limited information was available. Among organisations that had decided against

applying for Kitemark status, the main factor was the perceived complexity and time commitment involved. Without clearer evidence of the relative advantages of holding the Kitemark, senior leaders had not been convinced by the case to invest resources. Others viewed the Kitemark favourably and indicated that the organisation would likely consider applying if the scheme is reopened. A further set of organisations considered that it was not necessary to follow the Kitemark route having invested in alternative schemes with similar aims regarding children and young people's rights and participation.

The review highlights several limitations in the current design and scaling of the NPS Charter and Kitemark. Stakeholders noted the gap between the light touch of the Charter status and the end goal of Kitemark attainment. The Charter was perceived to lack an action-orientation, being a statement of commitment to the NPS rather than a visible means of benchmarking current progress. In contrast, the process of obtaining the Kitemark was a large step-up in commitment. Taken in combination, there is some risk that the structure may somewhat reinforce existing disparities in local capacity and prioritisation of the NPS. In the case of local authorities especially, this was felt to lack fairness and equity in what children and young people might expect from public services across Wales.

The review also suggests that the scheme has suffered from limited opportunities to share best practices and to learn from the work of other organisations. There was a clear appetite for knowledge-sharing and peer support, while acknowledging and valuing the support provided by Children in Wales around the application and assessment processes. A lack of monitoring and evaluation of steps taken at a local level to promote and facilitate children and young people's participation has posed a barrier to assessing the role and contribution of the Charter and Kitemark. As such, it is difficult to objectively compare the effectiveness of the scheme with alternative local models, despite promising case study examples. While it would be somewhat unfair to compare the scheme with an internationally supported programme such as the UNICEF Child Friendly Cities Initiative, the latter provides an example of how embedded tools for monitoring and feedback can strengthen the evidence base.

## **Future development**

Overall, the review indicates that the NPS Charter and Kitemark could have a continuing role to play as one of a number of mechanisms to support and challenge public sector organisations in Wales to implement the NPS. The recent hiatus presents the drawback of having lost some momentum for the scheme. At the same time, however, it provides an opportunity to address some of the perceived areas for development and refinement.

Reflecting on the literature review and qualitative findings, several key themes emerge:

- **Differentiation** - there was a clear message from the interviews that one size does not fit all, and that the NPS Charter and Kitemark scheme would benefit from additional scaffolding and interim milestones against which to celebrate progress with NPS implementation. The literature review showed that most of the effective documented schemes adopt a tiered approach. A Gold, Silver, Bronze award model may provide a better fit with the hallmarks of effective schemes in the literature, catering for

organisations at varying stages of development, and validating the journey from early progress to excellence. This might include judgement criteria evidencing progress against the 7 NPS standards at the respective levels (Gold, Silver, Bronze), to differentiate between minimum expectations and exemplar practices. Supplementary guidance may also prove beneficial for public sector organisations other than local authorities, tailored to their service context (e.g. health, crime, education).

- **Scope** – the review indicates that take-up and ambassadorship for the NPS Charter and Kitemark has focussed on organisations or services with a clear remit and expertise for children and young people. This is wholly appropriate and has helped to ensure that participation efforts are led by those with an understanding of child rights, safeguarding and age-appropriate tools and mechanisms. At the same time, the review shows that awareness and engagement with the NPS has often fallen short within organisations or services within the wider public sector. As with much of the research on this topic, the evidence points towards a lack of awareness of child rights and participation among wider services, a lack of perceived relevance, and gaps in skills and competences for participation. This is likely to require a combination of leveraging support at a strategic level through awareness raising for PSBs and RSBs, and celebrating good practice examples of cross-sectoral work as a demonstration of what can be achieved.
- **Accountability** - the review found that stakeholders have welcomed flexibility, tailoring measures to support the implementation of the NPS according to local needs. This has proven beneficial in many ways, to cater for a wide range of organisational types and settings. At the same time, there was a recognition of the need for stronger accountability mechanisms to help establish a minimum level of expectation and to provide challenge alongside support. There is a case for Welsh Government to consider how or whether public sector organisations, and local authorities in particular might be further challenged to demonstrate progress with NPS implementation. A relaunched Charter and Kitemark scheme with a higher profile offers a potential way to reward excellence while incentivising other organisations to follow their example.
- **Capacity building** – public sector staff reported operating in the context of finite budgets and competing priorities and there was a demand for tools and resources to support them in their role advocating for the NPS. Alongside the support already provided by Children in Wales, a case was made for a toolkit with checklists, reporting templates, and examples of good practice to communicate what is needed to meet the standards to busy departments, and to help ensure consistency and sustainability across teams. Training for participation officers within public sector organisations about the Charter and Kitemark processes to embed knowledge and share it within their own organisations was also highlighted as a capacity building action that might help with sustainability.
- **Evidence** - effective schemes in the literature are both ‘measurable and celebrated’. The measurement aspect is a relative shortcoming of the NPS Charter and Kitemark to date. Should the schemes be updated and newly implemented, it would be beneficial to commission a full independent evaluation of the schemes to gather additional empirical

evidence of their effectiveness and outcomes. This follows in the vein of work undertaken to evaluate equivalent rights-based programmes in Wales, such as Healthy Schools Wales. An independent evaluation would also assist with generating case studies and testimonials to strengthen the work of local participation teams in advocating for the NPS with senior leaders. Support with self-evaluation and evidence-gathering is also an important aspect of capacity building, as per above, while stakeholders would also clearly welcome further connections with other organisations, undertaking peer learning and sharing practices. The All Wales Participation Workers' Network (AWPWN) offers a potential route for this.

- **Child and youth voices** - child and youth participation was reflected in the development of the NPS as well as being the subject of the individual standards, which was widely welcomed by stakeholders championing the NPS at a local level. The existing Charter and Kitemark model presents some limitations, however. There was consensus that the Young Inspector model, while greatly valued, is not currently scaled to meet the needs of an expanded scheme. Stakeholders identified a priority to review the sufficiency of resources for Young Inspector recruitment, training and supervision, and to scale-up proportionately, should the national scheme be re-instated.

It would be beneficial to revisit and consider rebalancing the national-local dimension, so that the Young Inspector team engages collaboratively with local child and youth structures to reach their assessments of NPS progress, drawing on the local knowledge and lived experiences of those to whom local services are ultimately accountable. This would provide a suitable opportunity to reflect the diverse views of children and youth who may be under-served or seldom heard in their local context, avoiding placing an onus on the national Young Inspector cohorts to represent all children in Wales.

- **Visibility and dissemination** – mindful of the effectiveness of a 'recognition plus dissemination' awards model in the literature, momentum for the NPS Charter and Kitemark might be considerably enhanced by connecting the process to more visible celebrations of achievements. An annual awards event would provide a means of stamping the NPS on the calendar, and a forum for local participation teams to bring along representatives from other services or departments so that there is a collective stake and sharing in success beyond Children and Youth Services alone. As the scheme has been in hiatus, a rebrand and relaunch may also help to boost visibility and establish a foothold for the scheme among other awards and programmes.

## Final thoughts

The review concludes that there is merit in the use of charters, accreditation schemes and awards and that these models have a potential role in supporting the future implementation of the NPS in Wales. The Welsh Government is well placed to maximise the learning from comparable schemes, while also extending engagement with children and young people to develop a model that puts their needs and interests at the centre.

With the scheme currently on hold, Welsh Government ultimately faces a choice between:

- a) re branding and re-launching the NPS Charter and Kitemark along the lines of the current model.
- b) a re-design phase, building on further consultation and co-design with children and young people, and potentially including adjustments to the accreditation structure, assessment and monitoring processes to align with documented best practices.
- c) discontinuation of the scheme in favour of alternative mechanisms for supporting public sector organisations to implement the NPS, alongside information and signposting to other branded schemes and initiatives that local authorities may wish to consider.

The Welsh Government may wish to undertake further consultation to determine the optimum configuration of schemes, awards and incentives to support the implementation the NPS, including the tabling of specific options for appraisal. Any future development will require the active participation of children and young people, so that their needs and priorities are built-in from the outset.

## Annex A: Analytical framework

Aims	Objectives	Research questions	Method selection				
			Scoping research	Literature review (REA)	Key stakeholder interviews	CYP interview/focus group	Analysis and reporting
<b>Aim one:</b> To review evidence surrounding the efficacy of charters, accreditation schemes and awards in supporting organisations to embed national approaches in practice. This aspect of the research will synthesise key literature to understand the characteristics of the most effective approaches within the public sector.	Objectives 1, 3 and 4	1.1 What schemes have been implemented in Wales and in comparable countries, to support organisations with embedding child rights and child participation in practice?	X	X			
		1.2 What are the key characteristics of these schemes, and how are they targeted and implemented?	X	X			
		1.3 What is the strength of the evidence for their relative effectiveness, and their contribution towards embedding child rights and child participation in public services?	X	X			
		1.4 What are the lessons learned about successful approaches for mainstreaming child rights-based approaches, beyond child and youth focussed teams or departments within public sector organisations?	X	X			
		1.5 What lessons can be drawn from other sectors, regarding the efficacy of charters, accreditation schemes and awards in supporting organisations to embed national approaches in local services and settings?	X	X			
		1.6 What can be concluded from the literature regarding best practices with the potential for adoption in supporting the implementation of the NPS in Wales?	X	X			X
<b>Aim two:</b> To undertake qualitative methods with public sector organisations responsible for promoting children and young people's participation to understand: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the barriers facing organisations from adopting the NPS Charter and</li> </ul>	Objectives 2, 3 and 4	2.1 What are overall levels of awareness and knowledge of the NPS among public sector organisations and within local authorities in particular?	X		X		
		2.2 How are the NPS applied in practice, and what factors influence the scope and extent of implementation?	X		X		
		2.3 What factors influence decisions whether to take up the Kitemark or Charter and the reasons for adopting alternative frameworks or models?	X		X		
		2.4 In what ways do the Kitemark and/or Charter support organisations to promote and embed the NPS for children and young people in their services and practice?	X		X		

Aims	Objectives	Research questions	Method selection				
			Scoping research	Literature review (REA)	Key stakeholder interviews	CYP interview/focus group	Analysis and reporting
<p>Kitemark, preventing uptake of the schemes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the extent to which the Charter and Kitemark support organisations to deliver and embed the NPS</li> <li>the reasons why some organisations have chosen alternative frameworks or models to promote participation.</li> </ul> <p>To undertake qualitative methods with children and young people who are familiar with the NPS Charter and Kitemark processes to understand:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>children and young people's role in the NPS Charter and Kitemark processes</li> <li>children and young people's views regarding what is working well / less well in the NPS Charter and Kitemark processes</li> </ul>		2.5 What are the enablers and barriers that exist for organisations who have adopted and not adopted the Charter and Kitemark, and how might these be addressed to improve uptake?	X		X		
		2.6 What are the optimal arrangements for embedding the NPS in future, and how are the Charter and Kitemark best positioned to ensure the Welsh Government's commitment to CYP rights is realised across public sector organisations?	X		X		X
	2.7 What role do children and young people play in the NPS Charter and Kitemark processes and to what extent does their involvement improve the quality of youth participation?					X	
	2.8 What are children and young people's perceptions of what works well in the NPS Charter and Kitemark processes?					X	
	2.9 What challenges or areas for improvement do children and young people identify in the NPS Charter and Kitemark processes?					X	

## Annex B: Evidence review protocol

REa questions:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What schemes have been implemented in Wales and in comparable countries, to support public sector organisations with embedding child rights and child participation in practice?</li> <li>2. What are the key characteristics of these schemes, how are they targeted and implemented and how are known challenges and barriers to implementation addressed?</li> <li>3. How and to what extent are outcomes of these schemes monitored, assessed and evaluated?</li> <li>4. What is the strength of the evidence for their relative effectiveness, and their contribution towards embedding child rights and child participation in public services?</li> <li>5. What are the lessons learned about successful approaches for mainstreaming child rights-based approaches, beyond child and youth focussed teams / departments within public sector organisations?</li> <li>6. What lessons can be drawn from other sectors, regarding the efficacy of charters, accreditation schemes and awards in supporting organisations to embed national approaches?</li> </ol>
Publication date:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2010 onwards<sup>1</sup></li> </ul>
Geographical scope:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wales, UK, and selected international comparator countries<sup>2</sup>.</li> <li>• Searches will start with the Welsh and then wider UK context to ensure that we effectively capture all relevant literature possible.</li> </ul>
Target groups:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Public sector organisations delivering charter and award schemes, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- those working with children and young people aged 0 -18, up to age 25 for special educational needs and disabilities (SEND).</li> <li>- those delivering public services to other groups (communities, adults, professionals).</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
Language:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Published in English or Welsh.</li> </ul>
Study type:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Policy directives; legislation; programme documents; academic and non-academic studies and/or evaluation reports; primarily focussing on published literature.</li> </ul>
Study topic:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Charters, schemes and standards through policy, practice and research, focus on relevance, impact, effectiveness, what works, good practices, and outcomes.</li> </ul>
Sources:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>UK public body websites</u>: Welsh Government, Scottish Government, Northern Ireland Executive, GOV.UK Research and Statistics, British Youth Council, Welsh Youth Parliament (Senedd Ieuenctid Cymru).</li> <li>• <u>Websites of independent and third sector organisations</u>: Save the Children UK / Save the Children Cymru, Barnardo's / Barnardo's Cymru, Action for Children / Action for Children (Wales), NYAS Cymru, TGP Cymru, Children in Wales/Northern Ireland/Scotland, National Children's Bureau / NCB Cymru, Joseph Rowntree Foundation, and the Nuffield Foundation, and respective Children's Commissioners (Wal, Eng, Sco, and NI), UNICEF.</li> <li>• <u>Websites of international organisations and public bodies</u>: OECD, UNESCO, European Commission (Europa), Council of Europe, and affiliated websites, and websites of public bodies in comparable (English speaking) countries outside the UK.</li> </ul>

<sup>1</sup> We propose to consider earlier reports only where these are the very highest quality / landmark studies or evaluation.

<sup>2</sup> Outside of the UK, examples will be sought from English speaking countries with comparable public services infrastructure, including OECD countries. Examples include: Ireland, New Zealand, Canada, and Singapore.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Searchable abstracts databases</u>: Children, Youth and Environments, Web of Science, International Bibliography of the Social Sciences, Education Resources Information Center (ERIC), Children and Society, and International Journal of Children’s Rights.</li> <li>• <u>Publication lists</u> of internationally recognised subject experts.</li> <li>• <u>Broader search engines</u> such as Google and Google Scholar.</li> </ul>
Search terms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Key words to support the search will include: “child(ren)”, “child rights”, “youth”, “young people”, “participation”, “engagement”, “UNCRC”, “Article 12”, “charter”, “kitemark”, “quality mark”, “award” and “accreditation”, “self-assessment”</li> </ul>

## Annex C: Example schemes and corresponding countries

The table below outlines the schemes explicitly mentioned as key examples in section 3. 'Findings from the evidence review'.

Scheme	Country
Beacon Scheme/ Beacon Council Award	UK
Corporate Parenting Charter: A Promise for Wales	Wales
Eco-Schools – Wales	Wales
IPAC Innovative Management Award	Canada
National Quality Award	Wales
Quality Customer Service (QCS) Mark	Republic of Ireland
Quality Mark for Youth Work Award	Wales
Rights Respecting Schools Award (RRSA)	UK
Welsh Language Charter	Wales
Welsh Network of Healthy School Schemes	Wales
Young Carers in Schools (YCiS) Award	England

## **Annex D: Data collection tools (in English)**

- Local authority stakeholder topic guide
- Other public bodies topic guide

### **Review of the National Participation Standards Charter and Kitemark for Children and Young People**

#### **Topic guide for interviews with local authority representatives**

##### Introduction

Thank you for agreeing to speak with me today.

The Welsh Government has appointed Ecorys to carry out research examining the implementation of the National Participation Standards (NPS) Charter and Kitemark for Children and Young People. The study aims to examine:

- the barriers facing organisations from adopting the NPS Charter and Kitemark, preventing uptake of the schemes
- the extent to which the Charter and Kitemark support organisations to deliver and embed the NPS
- the reasons why some organisations have chosen alternative frameworks or models to promote participation.

Over the coming months, we will be conducting interviews/focus groups with key stakeholders at national and local levels and reviewing the literature on charters, accreditation schemes and awards. The findings will be presented to the Welsh Government in a final report in autumn 2025, which Welsh Government plan to publish on their website.

Our discussion today should last between 45 minutes and 1 hour, exploring your views on the following:

- Background context to child rights and child participation in Wales
- The organisation of responsibilities in your organisation
- Experiences of implementing the National Participation Standards
- Views and experiences of the National Kitemark and Charter
- Future priorities for embedding the standards and raising awareness of child rights

#### **How information will be used and stored**

The information you share with us will be used to inform our findings, which we will present to the Welsh Government via reports.

*Permission to record:* With your permission we'd like to record the interview/focus group. The recording will be stored securely and accessed only by the research team, to provide an additional reference point to my notes and a chance to check back to record quotes in full.

*Voluntary nature of participation:* Taking part in this research is your choice and if you decide that you no longer want to take part, please let the Ecorys research team by emailing the research project manager, Gabriela Freitas (share the following email address: gabriela.freitas@ecorys.com).

*Anonymisation:* all individuals taking part in this research will remain anonymous, meaning you will not be named or otherwise identified in any reports presented to Welsh Government. We may use anonymous quotes in the reports and presentations. We will take steps to anonymise the reporting outputs, so you cannot be identified.

*Confidentiality:* Only the research team will know what you've said. (If in a focus group – ask everyone to respect each other's confidentiality.)

All information will be processed by Ecorys UK and partners under the terms of the UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR). More information can be found in the privacy notice which you received when the interview was arranged (researcher to provide this if participant hasn't seen this).

## **Background context**

1. Can we start with a brief overview of your role and professional background?
2. \*How are responsibilities for upholding commitments to the UNCRC and for child rights and child participation organised within your local authority? Probe on the following:
  - a. Who has overall responsibility for children's rights within your organisation?
3. To what extent have the challenges for realising child rights and children and young people's participation evolved in recent years in Wales?
  - a. What challenges and opportunities has this presented?
  - b. How has your local authority responded?

## **Meeting the National Participation Standards<sup>3</sup>**

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<sup>3</sup> Refer to NPS one page document. The standards relate to: 1) Information, 2) It's Your Choice, 3) No Discrimination, 4) Respect, 5) Get Something Out of It, 6) Feedback and 7) Working better for you

4. From your perspective, how clear and coherent are the National Participation Standards and the obligations placed on local authorities to meet them? [RN: have the NPS one page document ready to share on the screen if needed]
5. What practical steps have you taken to ensure that the Standards are met? Who has been involved and what are the resource implications?
6. \*What have been the main enablers and barriers to achieving the Standards? Probe on:
  - a. Whether some requirements presented by the NPS are more challenging to implement or harder to evidence than others
  - b. Challenges arising from embedding across the organisation (i.e. more specialist child and youth focussed departments such as youth services, vs. mainstreaming across departments where child and youth issues are more implicit, e.g. transport, housing)
7. To what extent are the Standards widely known and understood among the workforce?
  - a. What steps are taken to raise awareness and with what degree of success?
8. \*What types of monitoring or feedback do you gather, to assess progress with implementing the Standards?
9. \*To what extent have you seen benefits for the workforce and for children and young people as a result of meeting the Standards?
  - a. Is there evidence that they are supporting children and young people to be heard and to have a say in issues affecting them, within your local authority?
  - b. Do you have any practical examples to illustrate this?
10. \*To what extent are good practices and learning relating to the Standards currently shared between local authorities, and with other organisations in Wales?
  - a. What have been the benefits?
  - b. What more, if anything, would be helpful?

## **National Charter and Kitemark schemes**

### Overall views of the Charter and Kitemark schemes

11. \*We would now like to discuss the Charter and Kitemark in more depth. Could you tell me how familiar you are with the Charter and Kitemark please?
  - a. [if participant is not familiar, explain]: Organisations may voluntarily sign up to the Charter to demonstrate their commitment to the NPS over a 2 year period. They can then re-apply to the Charter, or they can apply to the Kitemark. This

is an award that recognises organisations' successful implementation of all 7 Standards, which involves a self-assessment process and an assessment by Young Inspectors.

My first set of questions focus on the Charter:

12. What are your overall views on the value of the Charter, as a means to demonstrate a commitment to meeting the Standards?
13. To what extent are the current requirements for the Charter appropriate and proportionate to the time and resources required to meet them?
  - a. [RN: the Charter process involves providing a written statement of intent to work in line with the national NPS for 2 years. Once the Charter is signed, the organisations or services will be listed on the Children in Wales and Young Wales website, and the Charter can be displayed across their facilities.]
14. \*What are the main push and pull factors for public sector organisations seeking to apply for Charter status?

My next set of questions focus on the Kitemark:

15. What are your overall views on the value of having a National Kitemark award, as a means to validate and celebrate the work of public authorities meeting the Standards?
16. Which aspects of Standard-setting and measurement should sit at national vs. local levels?
17. To what extent are the current requirements for the National Kitemark appropriate and proportionate the time and resources required to meet them?
  - a. [RN: This involves a self-assessment where organisations must provide evidence to demonstrate their achievement of all 7 Standards. Once this is submitted, an inspection is carried out by a team of Young Inspectors.]
18. \*What are the main push and pull factors for public sector organisations seeking to apply for Kitemark status?

Now, thinking about both the Charter and the Kitemark:

19. \*To what extent have efforts to implement and promote the NPS / Charter / Kitemark considered the needs of children and young people of different ages, needs and circumstances? Probe:
  - a. Are public sector organisations being gender inclusive in their approach?
  - b. [How] are local participation efforts meeting the needs of children and young people: who are care-experienced? with Additional Learning Needs (ALN)?
20. Are there any examples of good practices to share?

## **Experiences of participation in the schemes**

[RN: Note that the questions in this section are based on public sector organisations' involvement with the Charter, Kitemark and those who have not been involved at all. Please only ask questions in the sub-sections that are relevant to the organisation you are interviewing.]

### For local authorities who have held Charter status

21. How and when did your local authority consider an application to the Charter?

- a. What prompted the decision to go ahead?
- b. What did you aim to achieve?

22. How easy or difficult was the process of obtaining the Charter status?

- a. What aspects worked well?
- b. What, if anything, could be improved?

23. What have been the subsequent benefits of Charter status for the local authority?

- a. Can you give any examples?

24. What levels of awareness are there among the workforce of the Charter?

25. \*What factors affected your decision to renew the Charter status?

- a. Why did / didn't you opt to re-apply?
- b. [If they didn't re-apply] What, if anything, would address your concerns and encourage you to reconsider an application?

26. \*What monitoring arrangements are in place to ensure your local authority maintains its Charter status?

27. \*[for LAs that have not applied for Kitemark status] What factors affected your decision not to apply for the Kitemark registration?

- a. What factors prompted your decision not to apply for Kitemark status?
- b. What, if anything, would address your concerns and encourage you to reconsider an application?

### For local authorities who have held Kitemark status

28. \*How and when did your local authority consider an application for Kitemark status?

- a. What factors prompted the decision to apply for Kitemark status?
- b. What did you aim to achieve?

29. How easy or difficult was the process of obtaining the Kitemark?

- a. What aspects worked well?
- b. What, if anything, could be improved?
  - i. Probe in relation to:
    - 1. Evidence requirements
    - 2. Assessment and inspection processes
    - 3. Engagement with Young Inspectors
    - 4. Inspection feedback and how this was addressed
    - 5. Buy-in from staff across the local authority

30. \*What have been the subsequent benefits of Kitemark status for your LA?

- a. To what extent has the Kitemark supported the implementation of the Standards in practice?
- b. Have there been any unexpected benefits of Kitemark status for your LA?
- c. Can you give any examples, including for:
  - i. Children and young people (across different ages and characteristics)
  - ii. Participation workers and managers
  - iii. Strategic officials
  - iv. The wider local authority and/or community

31. What levels of awareness are there among the workforce of the Kitemark?

For local authorities with neither Charter nor Kitemark status

My next set of questions focus specifically on the Charter and Kitemark.

32. \*What factors affected your decision not to apply for the Charter or Kitemark scheme?

33. \*What, if anything, would address your concerns and encourage you to reconsider an application in future?

34. How does your local authority evidence that it meets its duties under the Well Being of Future Generation (Wales) Act (2015), which states that LAs are 'expected to work with relevant partners to adopt the National Participation Standards'?

**Other tools and approaches**

35.\*What other tools or measures are used in your local authority to raise awareness of children’s rights and to embed child participation in line with the National Participation Standards? Explore the following sub-questions:

- a. How and when were these introduced, and what was the context?
- b. What have been the main advantages and drawbacks of using them? How effective have they been, including for:
  - i. Children and young people (across different ages and characteristics)
  - ii. Participation workers and managers
  - iii. Strategic officials
  - iv. The wider local authority and/or community
- c. Can you give some practical examples?

### **Future policy development**

36.\*In your view, what type of support is most needed at a national level to support you to meet your duties in relation to the National Participation Standards?

37.\*To what extent would you like to see the continuation of a National Charter and/or Kitemark scheme, as a means to support the implementation of the Standards?

38.\*Which aspects of these schemes are best coordinated at a national level, and which should be coordinated locally?

- a. What are the advantages and drawbacks of national vs. local approaches?

39.\*What, if any, improvements would you like to see to the Charter, to improve its value as a means of encouraging and demonstrating a commitment to the Standards?

40.\*What, if any, improvements would you like to see to the National Kitemark and the processes for achieving it, to promote wider uptake and to improve its reach and efficacy?

41.\*What, if any, alternative tools or measures should be considered in future?

- a. If so, what are they and how / why would these be preferable?

### **Closing**

42.\*Was there anything else you wanted to share that we haven’t touched on during the interview?

Thank participant, explain next steps and close.

# **Review of the National Participation Standards Charter and Kitemark for Children and Young People**

## **Topic guide for interviews/focus groups with other public sector organisations**

### **Introduction**

Thank you for agreeing to speak with me today.

The Welsh Government has appointed Ecorys to carry out research examining the implementation of the National Participation Standards (NPS) Charter and Kitemark for Children and Young People. The study aims to examine:

- the barriers preventing organisations from adopting the NPS Charter and Kitemark,
- the extent to which the Charter and Kitemark support organisations to deliver and embed the NPS
- the reasons why some organisations have chosen alternative frameworks or models to promote participation.

Over the coming months, we will be conducting interviews/focus groups with key stakeholders at national and local levels and reviewing the literature on charters, accreditation schemes and awards. The findings will be presented to the Welsh Government which Welsh Government intend to publish on their website.

Our discussion today should last between up to 1 hour and 15 minutes, exploring your views on the following:

- Background context to child rights and child participation in Wales
- The organisation of responsibilities in your organisation
- Experiences of implementing the National Participation Standards
- Views and experiences of the National Kitemark and Charter
- Future priorities for embedding the standards and raising awareness of child rights

### **How information will be used and stored**

The information you share with us will be used to inform our findings, which we will be presented to the Welsh Government via reports.

*Permission to record:* With your permission we'd like to record the interview/focus group. The recording will be stored securely and accessed only by the research team, to provide an additional reference point to my notes and a chance to check back to record quotes in full.

*Voluntary nature of participation:* Taking part in this research is your choice and if you decide that you no longer want to take part, please let the Ecorys research team know by

emailing the research project manager, Gabriela Freitas (share the following email address: [gabriela.freitas@ecorys.com](mailto:gabriela.freitas@ecorys.com)).

*Anonymisation:* all individuals taking part in this research will remain anonymous, meaning you will not be named or otherwise identified in any reports presented to Welsh Government. We may use anonymous quotes in the reports and presentations. We will take steps to anonymise the reporting outputs, so you cannot be identified.

*Confidentiality:* Only the research team will know what you've said. (If in a focus group – ask everyone to respect each other's confidentially.)

All information will be processed by Ecorys UK and partners under the terms of the UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR). More information can be found in the privacy notice which you received when the interview was arranged (researcher to provide this if participant hasn't seen this).

### **Background context**

1. Can we start with a brief overview of your role(s) and professional background?
2. \*How are responsibilities for children's rights and child participation structured within your organisation(s)? Probe on the following:
  - a. Who has overall responsibility for children's rights within your organisation(s)?
  - b. Which department does children's rights sit in within your organisation(s)?
  - c. To what extent is there a specific focus on children and young people's participation in within your organisation(s) and/or department(s)?
3. Has there been a change in the responsibilities for your organisation(s) in relation to children's rights and children and young people's participation?
  - a. What has been the nature of the change?
  - b. What challenges and opportunities has this presented?
  - c. How has your organisation(s) responded?

### **Meeting the National Participation Standards**

4. From your perspective, how clear and coherent are the National Participation Standards<sup>4</sup>? [RN: have the NPS one page document ready to share on the screen if needed]

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<sup>4</sup> Refer to NPS one page document. The standards relate to: 1) Information, 2) It's Your Choice, 3) No Discrimination, 4) Respect, 5) Get Something Out of It, 6) Feedback and 7) Working better for you

5. What practical steps has/have your organisation(s) taken to ensure that the Standards are applied? Who has been involved and what are the resource implications?
6. \*What have been the main enablers and barriers to meeting the Standards? Probe on:
  - a. Whether some requirements presented by the NPS are more challenging to implement or harder to evidence than others
  - b. Challenges arising from embedding across the organisation (i.e. more specialist child and youth focussed teams/groups vs. mainstreaming across teams where child and youth issues are more implicit, e.g. transport, housing)
7. To what extent are the Standards widely known and understood among the workforce across your organisation(s)?
  - a. What steps are taken to raise awareness and with what degree of success?
8. \*What types of monitoring or feedback do you gather, to assess progress with implementing the Standards?
9. \*To what extent have you seen benefits for the workforce and for children and young people as a result of meeting the Standards?
  - a. Is there evidence that they are supporting children and young people to be heard and to have a say in issues affecting them, within your organisation?
  - b. Do you have any practical examples to illustrate this?
10. \*To what extent are good practices and learning relating to the Standards currently shared with other organisations in Wales?
  - a. What have been the benefits?
  - b. What more, if anything, would be helpful?

## **National Charter and Kitemark schemes**

### Overall views of the Charter and Kitemark schemes

11. \*We would now like to discuss the Charter and Kitemark in more depth. Could you tell me how familiar you are with the Charter and Kitemark please?

[if participant is not familiar, explain]: Organisations may voluntarily sign up to the Charter to demonstrate their commitment to the NPS over a 2 year period. They can then re-apply to the Charter, or they can apply to the Kitemark. This is an award that recognises organisations' successful implementation of all 7 Standards, which involves a self-assessment process and an assessment by Young Inspectors.

### My first set of questions focus on the Charter:

12. What are your overall views on the value of the Charter, as a means to demonstrate a commitment to meeting the Standards and working towards the Kitemark?

13. To what extent are the current requirements for the Charter appropriate and proportionate to the time and resources required to meet them?

[RN: the Charter process involves providing a written statement of intent to work in line with the national NPS for 2 years. Once the Charter is signed, the organisations or services will be listed on the Children in Wales and Young Wales website, and the Charter can be displayed across their facilities.]

14. \*What are the main push and pull factors for public sector organisations seeking to sign up for the NPS Charter?

### **My next set of questions focus on the Kitemark:**

15. What are your overall views on the value of having a National Kitemark award, as a means to validate and celebrate the work of public authorities meeting the Standards?

16. To what extent are the current requirements for the National Kitemark appropriate and proportionate to the time and resources required to meet them?

[RN: This involves a self-assessment where organisations must provide evidence to demonstrate their achievement of all 7 Standards. Once this is submitted, an inspection is carried out by a team of Young Inspectors.]

17. \*What are the main push and pull factors for public sector organisations seeking to apply for Kitemark status?

### **Now, thinking about both the Charter and the Kitemark:**

18. \*To what extent have efforts to implement and promote the NPS / Charter / Kitemark considered the needs of children and young people of different ages, needs and circumstances? Probe:

- a. Are public sector organisations being gender inclusive in their approach?
- b. How, for example, are local participation efforts meeting the needs of children and young people: who are care-experienced? with Additional Learning Needs (ALN)?
- c. Are there any examples of good practices to share?

### **Experiences of participation in the schemes**

[RN: Note that the questions in this section are based on public sector organisations' involvement with the Charter, Kitemark and those who have not been involved at all. Please only ask questions in the sub-sections that are relevant to the organisations you are interviewing.]

### For organisations who have held Charter status

19. How and when did your organisation(s) consider signing up to the Charter?
  - a. What prompted the decision to go ahead?
  - b. What did you aim to achieve?
20. How easy or difficult was the process of signing up to the Charter?
  - a. What aspects worked well?
  - b. What, if anything, could be improved?
21. What have been the subsequent benefits of Charter status for the organisation(s)?
  - a. Can you give any examples?
22. What levels of awareness are there among the workforce of the Charter?
23. How do you use your Charter status within your work?
24. What factors affected your decision to renew (or not) the Charter status?
  - a. Why did / didn't you opt to re-apply?
  - b. [If they didn't re-apply] What, if anything, would address your concerns and encourage you to reconsider an application?
25. \*What monitoring arrangements are in place to ensure your organisation(s) maintains its Charter status?
26. \*Did your organisation(s) progress to applying for Kitemark status? What factors affected your decision to go on to apply for the Kitemark award?
  - a. Why did / didn't you opt to apply?
  - b. [If they didn't apply] What, if anything, would address your concerns and encourage you to reconsider an application for the Kitemark?

### For organisations who have held Kitemark status

27. \*How and when did your organisation(s) consider an application for Kitemark status?  
[RN: if already asked as part of Q26 then please skip]
  - a. What prompted the decision to go ahead?
  - b. What did you aim to achieve?
28. How easy or difficult was the process of obtaining the Kitemark?
  - a. What aspects worked well?

- b. What, if anything, could be improved?
- c. Probe in relation to:
  - i. Evidence requirements
  - ii. Assessment and inspection processes
  - iii. Engagement with Young Inspectors
  - iv. Inspection feedback and how this was addressed
  - v. Buy-in from staff across your organisation

29. \*What have been the subsequent benefits of Kitemark status for your organisation(s)?

- a. To what extent as the Kitemark supported the implementation of the Standards in practice?
- b. Have there been any unexpected benefits of Kitemark status for your organisation(s)?
- c. Can you give any examples, including for:
  - i. Children and young people (across different ages and characteristics)
  - ii. Frontline staff and managers
  - iii. Strategic officials
  - iv. The wider organisation and/or community

30. What levels of awareness are there among the workforce of the Kitemark?

31. How do you use your Kitemark status within your work?

32. What monitoring arrangements are in place to ensure your organisation(s) maintains compliance with the standards to ensure your Kitemark status is maintained?

For organisations with neither Charter nor Kitemark status

33. \*What factors affected your decision not to apply for the Charter or Kitemark scheme?

34. \*What, if anything, would address your concerns and encourage you to reconsider an application in future?

**Other tools and approaches**

35. \*What other tools or measures are used in your organisation(s) to raise awareness of children's rights and to embed child participation in line with the National Participation Standards? Explore the following sub-questions:
- a. How and when were these introduced, and what was the context?
  - b. What have been the main advantages and drawbacks of using them?
  - c. How effective have they been, including for:
    - i. Children and young people (across different ages and characteristics)
    - ii. Frontline staff and managers
    - iii. Strategic officials
    - iv. The wider organisation and/or community
    - v. Can you give some practical examples?

### **Future policy development**

36. \*In your view, what type of support is most needed at a national level to support you to meet the National Participation Standards?
37. \*To what extent would you like to see the continuation of a National Charter and/or Kitemark scheme, as a means to support the implementation of the Standards?
38. \*Which aspects of these schemes are best coordinated at a national level, and which should be coordinated locally?
- a. What are the advantages and drawbacks of national vs. local approaches?
39. \*What, if any, improvements would you like to see to the Charter, to improve its value as a means of encouraging and demonstrating a commitment to the Standards?
40. \*What, if any, improvements would you like to see to the National Kitemark and the processes for achieving it, to promote wider uptake and to improve its reach and efficacy?
41. \*What, if any, alternative tools or measures should be considered in future, to support the implementation of the National Participation Standards?
- a. If so, what are they and how / why would these be preferable?

### **Closing**

42. Was there anything else you wanted to share that we haven't touched on during the interview?

Thank participant, explain next steps and close.

## Annex E: Bibliography

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