

Young people's participation in decision making

2005-2006



Arolygiaeth Ei Mawrhydi dros Addysg
a Hyfforddiant yng Nghymru

Her Majesty's Inspectorate
for Education and Training in Wales



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Publication Section

Estyn

Anchor Court

Keen Road

Cardiff

CF24 5JW or by email to publications@estyn.gsi.gov.uk

This and other Estyn publications are available on our website: www.estyn.gov.uk

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Introduction

1 Purpose

- 1 The purpose of this advice is to:
 - identify, analyse and evaluate the systems and opportunities that providers have in place to manage the participation of young people in the services they provide; and
 - review how young people respond to the opportunities to participate within a range of services.

2 Scope

- 2 Inspectors looked at the extent to which young people aged 11-25 have opportunities to participate meaningfully in decision making on issues which affect their lives. Inspectors focused specifically on aspects of activity over which local authorities and schools have direct control, or the capacity to influence partners.
- 3 The advice includes judgements about the practical application of Welsh Assembly Government policies. It makes recommendations to the Welsh Assembly Government to assist with future planning, policy decisions and to contribute to the vision outlined in the Learning Country¹ and Extending Entitlement.
- 4 The advice provides a view of what is going on across Wales. This will assist providers and practitioners to plan future action within their own organisations and to ensure that young people experience more responsive and participative services.

3 Definition

- 5 The definition of participation used by inspectors in this advice is: 'Participation means that it is right to be involved in making decisions or planning and reviewing an action that might affect me. Having a voice, having a choice'².

4 Background

- 6 As part of its remit work for 2005-2006, the Welsh Assembly Government asked Estyn to provide advice on the extent to which young people participate in decision-making on issues that affect their lives.

¹ Learning Country: A comprehensive Education and Life Long Learning Programme to 2010 in Wales. 2001.

² This was the prize winning strap line in a Welsh Assembly Government competition for young people.

- 7 The Welsh Assembly Government outlines its commitment to the participation of children and young people in its three key documents:
 - Children and Young People: A Framework for Partnership;
 - Extending Entitlement: Supporting Young People in Wales; and
 - Children and Young People: Rights to Action.
- 8 More recently, the Welsh Assembly Government has published draft guidance on the Children Act 2004 which also notes the importance of Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) which identifies children and young people's right to participation.
- 9 Section 176 of the Education Act 2002 aims to encourage greater participation by children in decision-making within schools. It places duty on local education authorities and governing bodies to consult with school pupils when making decisions that affect them.
- 10 The School Councils (Wales) Regulations 2005 outline that the governing body of a school must establish a school council, so that pupils can discuss matters relating to their school, education and other matters of concern.

5 Evidence base

- 11 The evidence base includes:
 - Estyn inspection evidence for the year 2005-2006 from all sectors which provide services to young people aged 11-25; and
 - visits by inspectors to four selected local authority areas.
- 12 Inspectors visited Ceredigion, Merthyr, Wrexham and Bridgend local authority areas. They interviewed staff and managers; reviewed strategic and planning documents; and held discussions with young people.

Main findings

- 13 There has been a significant increase in the awareness of the participation agenda by managers and staff across youth support services over the last two years. In many cases, this is because of national policy drivers such as the development of Young People's Partnerships³, the entitlement agenda, Funky Dragon⁴ and the requirement to establish school councils.
- 14 Many young people feel that they are listened to in schools. Mainly, this is through getting involved with school councils. In the best cases, young people are involved in whole school developments to increase participation, and take part in the development of innovative teaching and learning policies.
- 15 Many young people, particularly those within specialist projects, develop high levels of personal and social skills. These skills enable them to be fully involved in a wide range of consultation events and processes, both at local and national level.
- 16 Young people have regular opportunities to build on the experiences and skills gained through participation. They develop useful skills and become staff, senior members or volunteers within the organisation with which they got involved. There are good examples of this within the local authority youth services, youth offending teams and leaving care teams.
- 17 Specialist, targeted projects often have participation at the heart of their ethos. These projects often include small groups of vulnerable young people. The projects give high levels of support so that young people can engage effectively in consultation activities.
- 18 In a minority of cases, young people's participation and involvement has a direct influence on the direction of key local and national services and strategies.
- 19 Funky Dragon targets the most hard to reach young people and encourages them to participate effectively.
- 20 Young people are involved in decision making in different ways and through a wide range of organisations. In the best cases, staff use creative methods to build young people's enthusiasm, skills and interest in participation.
- 21 In the main, young people, staff and managers are highly committed to consultation and informed participation. Often participation activities are started by staff and are shared with a few young people.
- 22 Overall, providers do not plan strategically to include young people in decision making. Therefore, the involvement of young people is often not managed well at a senior level.

³ Young People's Partnerships (YPP). The aim of Young People's Partnerships is to ensure the effective organisation of youth support services in a local authority area.

⁴ Funky Dragon. Children and Young People's Assembly for Wales.

- 23 Few young people set the agenda and demonstrate higher level skills. Often, staff do not challenge young people sufficiently to extend their skills and ability to lead meetings and set agendas.
- 24 Many providers do not share information about young people's participation well enough with each other. This means that a co-ordinated approach to provide truly effective high-level participation is not in place.
- 25 Providers do not have robust ways to evaluate the effectiveness or impact of participation. Therefore providers and young people are unclear about the value of getting young people involved in decision making.
- 26 When gathering information from young people, providers do not always use it well to respond to the needs of young people or to improve services. Hard to reach groups of young people are consistently not involved in consultation and participation activities. These groups include young people in the travelling community, homeless young people and disabled young people.
- 27 There are few opportunities for those who use Welsh as their language of choice to participate in decision making through the medium of Welsh.
- 28 Half of the local authorities visited do not have a well-established authority wide youth forum or council.
- 29 Staff skills and knowledge about the participation of young people are too variable across Wales. Training in participation offered across Wales is not co-ordinated or standardised by providers. Therefore, staff do not always provide effective ways for young people to engage in consultation and participation activities or develop skills and knowledge.
- 30 Young people have not yet developed the skills, knowledge or confidence to demand that their voices are heard.
- 31 There is little or no involvement in decision making in certain settings. These settings include many statutory sector youth clubs, clubs and activities managed by national voluntary youth associations and a few schools.
- 32 There is very little participation in decision making by the 16-25 age group.
- 33 Staff do not always understand their responsibilities for encouraging participation.

Recommendations

- 34 In order to improve participation by young people, the following actions need to be taken.

The Welsh Assembly Government should:

- R1 provide strategic level support and advice on participation to senior leaders and providers across sectors. This support and advice should include a wide range of participation methods and processes, rather than focusing on youth forums or school councils;
- R2 fund the improvement of systems for participation by investing in the development of resources, training and systems rather than simply employing workers;
- R3 consider whether or not it is appropriate to use legal powers to reinforce the development of the participation agenda in sectors other than schools. The School Councils (Wales) Regulations 2005 has enabled the participation agenda to make progress and gain support quickly in schools;
- R4 make participation by young people a condition of receipt of Welsh Assembly Government funding if the money affects young people's lives. This should span all Welsh Assembly Government departments;
- R5 continue to draw on the expertise available from Funky Dragon to inform planning strategy. In particular, take note of the recent specific interest project to develop advice on working with the hard to reach;
- R6 establish a strategy to share good practice in participation across providers and across departments within the Welsh Assembly Government;
- R7 require that young people's partnerships put in place strategies to support young people to be involved in the running of the partnership and in decision making; and
- R8 develop comprehensive training for those working with young people including youth workers, teachers and Youth Offending Team workers to enhance their skills and knowledge in including young people in decision making.

Providers should:

- R9 develop a Young People's Participation Strategy that is owned by all managers, staff and young people;
- R10 ensure that all staff who are responsible for young people's participation have received suitable training and have the required knowledge and skills to undertake the task;

- R11 integrate the participation of young people within the core work of the organisation;
- R12 make sure that staff understand that everyone is responsible for planning the participation of young people in all aspects of youth support services. Develop understanding by managers and staff that the process of involving young people is far wider than forums or councils;
- R13 use a range of ways to listen to young people, so that methods used are fit for purpose and suitable for the target group;
- R14 ensure that young people are involved consistently across all the activities in an organisation, and that they receive feedback from staff working with them;
- R15 identify groups of young people who are not participating in decision making, and take appropriate action to include them;
- R16 increase the capacity of providers and staff to deliver the participation agenda;
- R17 make sure that young people understand their roles and responsibilities within organisations and in their communities, and get involved in making decisions on issues that affect their lives; and
- R18 make sure that young people are aware of their rights to the 10 Entitlements.

The achievement of young people

- 35 Overall, young people achieve well when they are encouraged to participate in decision making. These young people develop a wide range of skills and knowledge. Their increased skills greatly improve their ability to engage with decision-making processes. These skills include listening, negotiating and communicating with adults, computer skills, negotiating and budgeting. Many young people develop key skills through the work they do when they take part in participation activities in schools. They learn how to make difficult decisions and how to challenge decisions appropriately. As a result, many young people can explain what they learn through being actively involved in participation projects. They often move on to developing wider skills and to taking up further opportunities.
- 36 Across Wales, young people gain valuable experiences through a range of participation opportunities. However, they are not able to judge how effective these opportunities are in helping them to learn and gain experience.
- 37 Over the past three years, young people transferring from primary schools to secondary schools have good skills which help them to get involved in decision making. In the best examples, circle time activities, school councils and a focus on participation in teaching and learning in primary schools give young people the decision-making skills they need in secondary schools. Younger pupils therefore have more skills and increased confidence to engage in decision-making. Young people who have learnt practical skills through participation:
- get more involved in debates within the classroom;
 - are more involved in out of school activities; and
 - get further involved in school based activities.
- 38 In the best examples, young people involved in school councils develop high level participation skills. In these examples young people:
- set the agenda;
 - develop interviewing skills and are involved in staff recruitment; and
 - work effectively with teachers and work to contracts outlining their roles and responsibilities within the group.
- 39 However, in a few cases where schools are not fully committed to developing the decision making skills that young people need, the young people remain poorly equipped to participate. These young people do not have the necessary skills and knowledge to get fully involved in decision making that affects their lives.
- 40 Young people respond well and develop good decision making skills where organisations have systems and structures in place to support them. For example,

young people involved in the Young Farmers Clubs (YFC) demonstrate increasing confidence, which they get from trying out their ideas in a safe and supportive environment at a local level.

- 41 However, many organisations have not developed arrangements to involve young people in decision making or planned to build their skills incrementally. In these organisations young people remain over reliant on adults to take the lead, and are slow to develop their own decision making skills.
- 42 About half of the local authorities visited have developed county-wide youth forums or councils. In these groups, young people show high levels of skill when responding to local and national consultation exercises. They are confident and demonstrate good presentation, listening, negotiating and organisational skills. A few young people influence managers and councillors locally and have a positive influence on the profile of young people in their area. However, often, young people within the youth forums frequently struggle with developing the skills they need to chair, organise and lead groups.

The effectiveness of work with young people and assessment

- 43 Most staff show high levels of commitment to participation and to the young people they guide through the decision making process. These staff involve young people fully in the planning, review and evaluation processes. In the best cases, staff have a good understanding of the contribution of participation to national initiatives. In addition, staff actively respond to national developments and consultation processes. However, too many staff are not aware of the importance of participation within the Welsh Assembly Government's policy agenda or how their work links to this agenda. Staff in one local voluntary sector organisation found it useful to have attended a management training course which raised awareness of Extending Entitlement, participation and self evaluation processes. This training helped staff put the policy agenda and the participation of young people into context together.
- 44 Many staff, in a variety of education settings, such as the Youth Service and schools, recognise the benefits of involving young people. However, they do not always know how to put participation into practice in teaching and learning. Staff in national voluntary youth organisations and in the part-time Youth Service do not always understand participation as a core principle. The lack of knowledge, skills and experience therefore means that these staff are unable to put suitable structures in place to support young people's participation.
- 45 Many staff design and deliver appropriate and engaging participation activities, and young people respond well. However, staff often rely on bringing young people together to find out their opinions. They do not think of other ways to consult them or find out their views. A minority of staff across the range of youth support services do not understand their role in encouraging the participation of young people. Often, these staff do not recognise that they have an important role to play in developing young people's participation skills. They consider this to be someone else's responsibility rather than integral to their own work.

How well learning experiences meet the needs of young people and the wider community

- 46 Many young people have positive learning experiences which meet their needs through involvement in participation. Young people participate and influence decision making in many ways and settings. In the main, young people gain valuable skills, which they can take back to their various communities. These skills include working in teams, meeting deadlines and working with adults.
- 47 Several community-based partnerships consult young people within the context of their community. Communities First do this well in a few local authority areas. This means that young people develop citizenship skills and get the opportunity to put these skills into practice. Community partnerships do not always consider ways in which young people can be enabled to participate in the partnerships' strategic planning. Individual organisations often work closely with young people and will listen to their views. However, these views are not consistently included in wider plans such as the Young People's Partnership plan, 14-19 plan, Crime and Disorder Partnership plan or Education Strategic Plan.
- 48 Overall, young people taught in settings outside school have more influence on their curriculum and on wider aspects of their education than those in secondary schools. In a few authorities, these young people also have opportunities to tell the Young People's Partnerships and LEAs about the impact of the projects on their access to education. The young people have the chance to explain the strengths of participation to leaders and managers. However, this is not always the case. Where Young People's Partnerships and local authority consultation mechanisms are not well established, the young people do not have the opportunity to make meaningful decisions about important issues and communicate them to those who plan and deliver services to them. For example young people in a Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) get involved in choosing their own positive learning experience from a menu. Often the choices are from what is available rather than of the preference and needs of the learner. In one PRU, school council meetings were based on leisure needs such as young people wanting a play station for use at break times, rather than more important curriculum and support needs.
- 49 Changes in management decisions take place in many schools when staff respond to the views and opinions of young people. There are many examples of young people making changes to, for example, school meals, break times and toilet facilities. However, the most effective examples are seen in the few cases, where young people influence decisions regarding issues such as:
- widening the curriculum in the sixth form;
 - making changes in discipline management;
 - teaching styles; and
 - practical aspects of the curriculum.

- 50 A minority of school leaders do not do enough to extend the opportunity to all young people to participate effectively in school councils.
- 51 About half of local authority areas visited have a youth forum or council in place where young people can express their views. However, it is often unclear how the young people have been selected. Young people are often unclear about their roles. They are not always representative of their community of need, interest or geography. This means that often, other young people do not have a way to give their views to the forums or receive feedback. In many cases, forums only recruit young people from local authority youth clubs or school councils.
- 52 Despite the range of opportunities available for young people to participate, many groups of young people cannot access these opportunities. Staff do not always help the young people who run forums and youth councils to understand why it is important to appreciate the needs of hard to reach groups of young people and include them. There are not enough opportunities for Welsh speakers, young people who are in the youth justice system and disabled people to participate. However, in a very few cases, providers target specific under-represented groups in order to engage them in participation. This includes travellers and asylum seekers. The participation rates of young people over 16 and up to 25 is poor.
- 53 The recently started Funky Dragon project to include specific interest groups such as young people involved in the youth justice system and Welsh speakers in consultation and participation activities is setting a useful example to local councils and forums.
- 54 There are a few very effective specialist programmes which develop young people's moral, social and cultural awareness. These programmes include peer education programmes which put young people at the centre of learning. Young people often get involved in volunteering as a consequence of participating. This is especially true in one YOT⁵, many Youth Services and one Menter Iaith⁶.

⁵ YOT. Youth Offending Team.

⁶ Welsh language community based initiative that offers support to communities to increase and develop their use of the Welsh language.

Care, guidance and support for young people

- 55 Many workers frequently provide good support to meet the additional needs of hard-to-reach groups and young people who are not achieving well or are not involved in education and training. Staff understand that these young people need support in order for them to be able to take part fully in participative processes. For example, learning support staff are made available for one group of young people on a supplementary curriculum⁷ project. This helps them make decisions and simple choices. In many local authority areas, peer support programmes encourage larger numbers of young people to get involved. In a few cases, peer support has a positive impact throughout schools and communities. One peer support programme within the YOT involves young people mentoring others younger than themselves.
- 56 However, some young people do not get the support they need to make important decisions which affect their lives. Often, young people involved with the YOT, Looked After Children and young carers do not have the confidence or support to get involved in many of the structures set up to involve young people. There are few examples of projects which successfully target their involvement in decision making. For example, young people in one local authority mentioned an advocacy project for young people. They felt that this project supported them well to participate more effectively.
- 57 Often, the support for participation does not get to the young people who need it the most because planning systems do not include resources for participation. In the few cases where systems identify both participation and support for participation, young people report positive outcomes personally and describe its positive impact on their schooling. For example, social workers supporting young carers planned a comprehensive support package for young people who wanted to get involved in a local authority forum. In addition, one school commissioned an external monitoring report on the whole school. During this process, the young people explained that they wanted more time to discuss issues informally with staff. This led to the school employing two outreach workers to support pupils in school.
- 58 In a minority of cases, communication between young people and staff is ineffective. In these instances, young people do not know about facilities and resources that would help them to participate more effectively. Information about ways of participating is not always available to young people educated outside the borough in which they live. This is especially true of those attending faith or Welsh medium schools.

⁷ Supplementary Curriculum – a range of projects where young people receive alternatives to parts of mainstream schooling.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

- 59 The Welsh Assembly Government has started to provide leadership to providers to help them develop approaches to young people's participation. The School Councils (Wales) Regulations 2005 have provided a strategic driver to enable schools to respond quickly to the participation agenda. The Youth and Pupil Participation Division,⁸ in partnership with the Schools Management Division, has also commissioned three scoping reports to help establish a base from which developments can be measured. In addition, the Participation Consortium⁹, in partnership with Save the Children, is working to share good practice and to build expertise in young people's participation in decision making across Wales.
- 60 Most key players within local authorities, including the local education authority, social services and the Chief Executive's department, understand the importance of young people's participation in decision making. Many YPPs and Youth Services have reinforced this commitment with a written strategy for participation. As a consequence, many providers have started to plan for young people's participation in decision making. They have a clause about their commitment to participation in their agreements with other organisations. For example, one YPP holds two performance management meetings with individual providers each year. The first is a meeting to monitor progress, the second is concerned with summarising the extent to which the project has met its performance targets which include participation levels. This informs the annual report.
- 61 However, overall, the systems providers put in place to plan and manage services do not include participation by young people as an integral part of decision making mechanisms. For example, when authorities consult on key policy documents, young people say that these have not been produced in formats or styles that they can easily understand.
- 62 In many authorities, senior managers are committed to the participation and entitlement agenda. They have put the foundations in place to improve the participation of young people. Increasingly, leaders and managers focus on ways to encourage more effective participation. The effectiveness of systems to encourage participation vary considerably from authority to authority and provider to provider. In one local authority, councillors tour smaller and more rural communities to meet with community councils and schools. This enables young people to communicate with councillors directly and regularly. Another authority had a named councillor as a champion for young people. However the councillor is unsure about his role, the participation agenda and how he can develop the involvement of young people.
- 63 Young people tell inspectors that leaders and managers are keen and committed to participation. In many cases, especially where provision is good, young people see the system as being effective and are confident that their voices are listened to. Overall, where young people are invited to take part in decision making, their

⁸ From 1st April 2006, this division is renamed the Youth and Lifelong Learning Opportunities Division.

⁹ Participation Consortium – Multi agency strategic body set up by Welsh Assembly Government to develop capacity and practice in participation.

opinions are acknowledged and acted upon. However, there is a lack of priority given to listening to young people's opinions by a few providers.

- 64 Most Young People's Partnerships are in the early stages of involving learners in strategic decisions. The partnerships have set out their objectives, and these include young people being involved in the planning and implementation of services. However, there are no effective systems for the partnerships to get the views of young people, and to ensure that these inform planning. In a few partnerships, there is potential for young people to be involved in the sub-groups of the YPP but this has not yet been taken up by coordinators or young people. The Children and Young People's Framework Partnerships¹⁰ often lead the participation agenda in local authority areas and have sub-groups or staff to focus on this issue. However, when putting participation into practice, the structures are often not robust enough to make a difference to young people. For example, in one authority the establishment of a Listening to Children group had not provided the required leadership in promoting the participation agenda. Therefore, there was a gap in leadership.
- 65 Overall, local youth committees and school councils are not yet influencing local authorities effectively. This is often due to communication problems between providers. However, authorities organise away-days and conferences to share views across groups. These include school council forums and cross-provider participation days.
- 66 The local authority wide youth forums are poorly established in about half the authorities visited. There are no mechanisms in place for election or to ensure fair representation on the forums. Roles and responsibilities are not clearly established.
- 67 The voluntary sector has an important role to play in the participation agenda because many organisations are used to developing the citizenship skills of young people. However, the contribution of the sector is underused. In a few cases where voluntary sector projects have appointed specific participation officers to involve young people, the outcomes have been successful. However, the lack of long term funding for this work means that participation has not had time to be embedded into the everyday practice of most organisations. Other voluntary organisations focus on annual timetabled activities, which mean that young people only have limited opportunities to make decisions on the services delivered.
- 68 Different ways of thinking about the participation of young people can raise issues between providers. Some providers believe that the young people should start any developments themselves, whereas others see any activity as a way to encourage participation. This leads to conflict and confusion between organisations. As a result young people do not get the same level of involvement from different providers.

¹⁰ The overarching planning mechanism for the 0 to 25 age group across a local authority area.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers in evaluating and improving quality and standards

- 69 The Participation Consortium, in partnership with Save the Children, is developing an impact assessment tool for young people's participation. It is too early to say what influence this tool will have on the quality of participation work with young people. However, the consortium provides an effective forum through which providers can share good practice, develop common standards for participation and work with the Welsh Assembly Government to improve the quality of standards in the delivery of participation.
- 70 Leaders and managers are not consistent in the way they involve young people in improving quality and standards. Only a few providers involve young people in:
- planning for improvements;
 - taking part in making improvements; and
 - evaluating improvements.
- 71 This is because leaders and managers are often unclear about the ways in which participation helps to improve the quality of work with young people, and improves planning to better meet the needs of young people. In addition, leaders and managers are not clear how the information young people share with them can be used to develop and improve services.
- 72 Young people are more often involved in planning, than in other elements of improving quality. For example, young people are invited to take part in consultation or planning exercises. One YOT had software that enabled young people to give their views about services. The views collected were used to improve service delivery.
- 73 In other situations, young people are involved in evaluating activities through questionnaires or happy sheets. These questionnaires are based mainly on satisfaction and ideas for the future rather than focussing on impact, and are of limited strategic use.
- 74 There are good examples of projects that involve young people in the planning, reviewing and evaluation of their own work and that of the staff. Examples include initiatives where youth workers are linked to schools and colleges. One Youth Service has a group of young people who form an internal inspection team. Young people within this programme are involved in quality monitoring within the Youth Service. The structure of these inspections is well developed with announced, unannounced (spot checks) and thematic inspections (Appendix 2).
- 75 In the most effective school councils young people are involved in making changes to the life of their school via the school improvement plan. This means that young

people are getting involved at all stages of planning. They also monitor progress of the agreed developments with senior staff.

- 76 Providers do not involve young people enough in their own self-assessment processes. In one case a Young People's Partnership consulted with the youth council about the parts of a Self Assessment Report that named them. However, the partnership did not include young people in the overall process. In the main, young people are not involved in planning for improvement. Therefore they do not understand their responsibilities for making improvements. These improvements may include their commitment to action or explaining to staff why services are or are not fit for purpose.

The effectiveness of the use of resources by managers

- 77 Few providers tell young people about available resources to help young people to contribute to judgements about prioritisation. On the few occasions where leaders and managers have provided young people with information about budgets, staffing allocation and available facilities, young people have contributed constructively to strategic discussions. For example, young people in one local authority considered tenders for developments on land in their community. The success of the project encouraged local authority staff to engage further with young people and to share more resourcing decisions.
- 78 Across Wales, there is good practice where young people work with leaders and managers to make the best use of resources. However, this good practice is not shared with colleagues to help raise the awareness of managers and staff of the participation agenda and to make good use of existing resources. It is too early to judge the impact on this of the Participation Consortium and the Youth and Pupil Participation Division's Policy, Inclusion and Participation team.
- 79 A few organisations such as the Young People's Partnership, Children and Young People's Framework and the health authority have committed significant resources to the participation agenda. However, this funding is often non-core and short term. Leaders and managers rarely plan resources strategically to support young people's participation. Also, in many cases, the promotion of participation relies on staff taking on additional responsibilities.
- 80 In the few cases where leaders and managers have made strategic and operational commitment to using resources to support participation, the impact is significant. For example, the Healthy Schools scheme does not release funding to schools without evidence that leaders and managers have involved young people in decision making. The scheme has led the participation agenda in many schools as it provides practical resources for young people and staff. In addition, the scheme encourages individual teachers to pilot innovative methods of involving young people.
- 81 Many local authorities have appointed individuals to facilitate participation or a county wide forum, usually within the Framework, the Youth Service or the Young People's Partnership. Too often, this leads to participation being seen as the responsibility of one individual rather than a core task for all staff, leaders and managers. The designated officer often works in isolation and has little opportunity to develop the work with other staff.
- 82 Most staff are aware of the importance of young people's participation in the services that affect their lives. However, they do not have the required skills or knowledge to carry forward the work of involving young people in decision making. This is particularly apparent across youth support services. Workers do not have access to specialist and specific training to enable them to take forward the Welsh Assembly Government's participation agenda.
- 83 The few staff who have experience and expertise in participation work, do not use their knowledge well to improve the range of participation opportunities for young

people. Appraisal systems for youth support service staff do not encourage them to include the participation of young people in their core work. Very few staff have targets that are linked to the development of young people's participation.

Appendix 1: Entitlements

This section looks at the range of services and the extent to which young people's participation is embedded in the ten entitlements. The 10 entitlements for young people aged 11-25 are outlined in Extending Entitlement: Supporting young people in Wales 2000.

Education, training, work experience

Schools

Most schools have effective methods of involving young people in decisions that affect their lives. In the best examples, school councils are having impact on whole school approaches to teaching and learning at strategic levels. Participation processes are used well as a learning device for pupils, occasionally being embedded into personal and social education (PSE) across the curriculum. In addition, young people are involved in staff appointments and are aware of funding decisions. However, all authorities have a few schools that operate in isolation and do not encourage young people's participation. Innovative practice is not shared effectively between schools. Young people in alternative curriculum projects take an active part in discussions about education opportunities available to them.

Youth Service

In many authorities, the Youth Service leads participation initiatives well. However, there are often low levels of genuine participation within the part-time Youth Service. This is due to the poor quality of planning, delivery and evaluation. In the few cases where there is good practice in the part-time service, youth workers enable young people to develop the skills they need to participate.

Work experience

In the best instances, young people receive good support to organise work experience. A database of employers gives them useful information about the availability of placements. Also, these young people are prepared well prior to their work experience and debriefed effectively at the end. However, other young people often make hasty decisions when choosing work experience placements. They do not participate meaningfully in the decision making process because they do not have enough information or the skills to arrange suitable placements. Many young people have placements that they do not regard as relevant to their career aims because they cannot find what they think are appropriate placements.

Access to Basic Skills

There are a few examples of young people who are involved in setting their own individual learning plans. However, parents and carers frequently have more influence than the young people.

Only a very few providers make the link between key skills developments and participation. Alternative curriculum projects help young people to develop skills for life. For example, young people learn how to use public transport and to make choices at restaurants.

Potential to be active citizens

Young people gain useful skills to support their participation in wider citizenship agendas through schools.

Many Communities First initiatives involve young people well. In many authorities, staff from youth centres and projects support young people well and help them to get involved in partnership meetings. One Communities First partnership pulls together the views of schools councils on community-based plans, rather than create a new system.

Young people who get involved in participation-based activities within their organisation are likely to further their learning through volunteering. The skills they learn from participation are therefore put into practice within their own community. There are good examples within the Youth Offending Team, Communities First and Menter Iaiith.

High quality and accessible services and facilities

There are a few innovative approaches to eliminate rural disaffection that help young people to get involved in participation. Young people were heavily involved in an external evaluation of how their school tackled rural disaffection. The young people identified the need for additional support with issues in the community that affected them out of school hours. This led to the employment of outreach inclusion workers. Their work is improving the young people's ability to participate well in school and to join in the life of the community in a more positive way.

There are few bilingual opportunities for young people who use Welsh as their language of choice.

Funky Dragon reaches out to young people with specific interests or needs. Funky Dragon has developed a programme targeting and supporting particular groups of young people. These are:

- young people with a disability;
- looked after young people;
- black and ethnic minority young people;
- young people involved in the juvenile justice system;
- young carers;
- young people with long term illness problems (not with disabilities);

- lesbian, gay and bisexual and transsexual young people; and
- homeless young people.

Young people lead the work, and empower other young people by helping them to develop the skills to participate in decision making. The project takes a 'can-do' approach and provides guidance to help young people move on.

Careers guidance

In the best instances, careers company staff work well with young people to ensure that they fully participate in their careers guidance interview. In less satisfactory situations, staff do not have sufficient knowledge to meet the needs of the young people. In a significant number of cases where services are less well developed, and quality management is not consistent, young people do not always have enough information or skills to help them to make decisions about their career ideas or plans.

Personal support and advice

Many YOTs make sure that young people discuss their programmes. One YOT is overcoming the obstacle of poor behaviour by young people which is a barrier to participation. Staff get the young people involved in activities related to their offence or behaviour so that they can understand the consequences of their actions and help to influence others not to behave in a similar way. However, in a few examples young people do not receive the support they need to get involved. Young people on Anti Social Behaviour Orders¹¹ (ASBOs) have very little or no support to make decisions that affect their lives.

Some voluntary sector partners, such as Barnados and NCH, have very high levels of understanding of the support required for some young people to participate. Appropriate support is made available for vulnerable young people; consequently they achieve very well in these groups and develop appropriate skills and knowledge.

Information on issues such as health and housing

The Local Health Boards and Public Health Authorities are involved in large amounts of work with young people and include them well in project planning and formal evaluation processes.

The healthy schools programme makes sure that each school includes young people's participation in their action plan. The action plan is not agreed without young people having taken part in decision making and funding is not released. This means that there is additional pressure to take positive action put on leaders and managers at a strategic level.

Other health projects focus on a range of aspects within participation, and a few examples are noted here. A project focusing on young people's emotional health

¹¹ Anti Social Behaviour Orders. Restrictive orders on behaviour and movement.

collects base line data from young people and measures progress against targets at regular intervals. In addition, at the end of each project, a follow up impact assessment is carried out to identify the extent to which services have made a difference to young their abilities to take part in decision making.

Health Promotion meets with young people at a strategic level to generate ideas and views. Across Wales, one of the young people's main concerns was the poor quality of sexual health education and services available at school. As a result, Health Promotion worked with young people to develop appropriate services to meet this need.

Young people identify their own needs through an interactive software programme. The programme asks 80 questions across themes such as money, lifestyle and health, and provides an analysis of need and priorities. The worker and young person then decide the activities that the young person will become involved with and the further information that they need. Young people review their own progress as they develop and update the information they have provided. This gives young people more information and confidence with which to make decisions about important aspects of their lives.

Recreation and social activities

Participation is a weak element of work with young people in recreation and social activities. Participation is not always a core activity within Youth Service part-time youth clubs or the Welsh part-time aelwydydd clubs. Staff only give young people a choice of activities, which are mainly based on the programme from the previous year.

Full-time voluntary sector youth projects present a very mixed picture. Many of these organisations have young people at the centre of the work and secure full involvement and long-term ownership by users. However, in too many cases, young people are not involved in planning or making decisions about activities.

The Young Farmers Clubs have a strong commitment to participation by young people. This ethos is built into their governance system at local, regional and national levels. This process includes a complaints system, a planning structure and forms the whole basis for the work of the organisation. Young people feel supported to make decisions and hold debates in a safe environment.

Sporting, artistic, outdoor experiences

Young people's involvement in planning is most effective when local authorities consider young people's views when setting up indoor sport and recreation facilities. These are public facilities that adults presume young people are likely to use. Examples include parks, skate parks and leisure centres. Increasingly, senior officers and local authority members listen to young people and plan accordingly.

Across Wales, young people have an impact on decisions about skate parks, bike facilities and multi-use games areas. Many local authorities welcome the voices of young people in making decisions about these types of amenities. However, the

views of young people are not always given such priority when other facilities they use such as new medical centres or housing areas are established.

Young people make good use of the arts to participate in decision making. Young people use films, documentaries and photographs very effectively to get others to understand their views and to take ownership of situations.

Right to be consulted

The Young People's Partnership or Youth Service often leads local authority wide developments on consultation with young people. These usually take the form of youth forums or councils. The forums often have subgroups, which vary from the strategic to the more operational. Examples include skateboarding, sport and leisure, sexual health, transport, housing and participation. In a few cases, local forums feed into a countywide structure. A few of these young people then represent their local authority on Funky Dragon.

Young People's Partnerships talk about young people's participation invite young people to make presentations or display a piece of their work. However, young people do not usually take part in making decisions about the work of the partnership. One Young People's Partnership receives progress updates from the Youth Council before each meeting as part of pre-meeting information. Another partnership has recently developed a participation toolkit. These initiatives have helped to raise awareness of participation issues amongst staff, providers and politicians, but it is too early to assess their impact.

Elected Members and their officers in one authority have initiated a borough-wide project with young people to promote awareness of the work of the council. Local authority-wide forums give young people the opportunity to be consulted on various local and national initiatives, including local health strategies, 14-19 consultations and national Clic.online consultations.

One partnership is in the process of putting in place a system of monitoring access to the ten entitlements. The partnership has also built into this a system of reporting back to young people in a concise way.

There is a lack of opportunities for young people to take part in participation activities through the medium of Welsh.

Appendix 2: Good practice

This section outlines good practice identified by inspectors.

Whole school approach to participation

The senior management team and teaching staff planned specifically and strategically to embed the participation of young people into the school culture. This is a long term process, which is strengthened each term.

The school council takes on specific tasks. On some occasions, the whole school is involved. For example, the whole school has completed questionnaires on learning styles, resources, curriculum behaviour and discipline. The school used the findings to plan for expanding the curriculum and managing young people's behaviour. The costs and financial implications of all decisions or discussions that affect young people are explained to the school council. Young people are also involved in appointments of teaching staff.

The school councillors are very aware of their roles and responsibilities. The school council members allocate tasks to council officers or sixth-form colleagues. This includes speaking with specific staff or external organisations and reporting back at the next meeting. All contributions by young people across all school years are valued and effective.

In addition, a sixth-form forum is in place. This involves a good level of debate with the focus on cooperation between staff and sixth-form students.

Through involvement in participation, young people have developed political awareness and social consciousness for both local and national issues.

Llais y Dysgwr/The Voice of the Learner

One local education authority outlines the strategic priority given to listening to young people in their education strategic plan. It is identified as Llais y Dysgwr/ The Voice of the Learner. The authority has a comprehensive approach to listening to young people in schools, specifically in relation to teaching and learning. In addition, a full consultation on the education strategic plan has taken place, facilitated by the youth service.

The local education authority monitors the extent to which schools involve the voice of learners and its impact on teaching and learning through link advisors. School councils are in place and are supported effectively by the link advisors. Schools and the local authority gather and act on learners' evaluations of learning at school. This has a positive impact on the ways teachers and learners work together. It has provided both managers and teaching staff with evidence that is used as a basis to plan future work.

The authority has also recognised the need to put action plans in place to make elected members, governors and parents more aware of the participation agenda.

14-19 Pathways - Learning styles consultation

One local education authority commissioned a learning styles consultation in order to build the results into the planning for 14-19 developments.

The results were gathered strategically and decisions about the future of 14-19 learning across the local authority have been made using learners' evaluations of learning at school and their preferred learning styles.

The data is also used by individual schools to help with planning for teaching and learning. There are also focus groups of young people which identify opportunities for working together to meet young people's needs in specific school catchment areas. Individual young people have seen a distinctive change in the way their education is delivered as a consequence of the consultation. This means that young people are able to learn more effectively, and that teachers can better plan their work.

Young Farmers Club (YFC) & Information Communications Technology

YFC members in one county found that participation was being hindered by poor communication strategies.

The members developed a website to ease the difficulties and make good use of web-based technology to involve each other and new or prospective members in the business of the organisation. The website is updated by members for members and it helps to share information with young people across a very wide rural area. A sense of ownership by young people is promoted and this leads to increased participation.

Assessment System for Youth Service Teams (ASSYST)

ASSYST is a project run by a local authority Youth Service. It aims to involve young people in measuring the impact and quality of services. It places young people at the heart of its service evaluation process. ASSYST has developed into a local inspection process.

Following a detailed training process, young people visit youth service projects and make judgements on good features and areas for improvement. Young people plan and implement the inspection, including follow-up visits to review post inspection action plans.

Young people are mature and confident, and suggest strategies to staff in order to improve participation. The project enables young people to form judgements, take responsibility for their own decisions and services, support others and make choices. The process and its outcomes send important messages to all staff and young people about participation and quality improvement. The process of evaluation led

by young people is effective in raising the awareness of young people and their expectations of youth support services, as well as improving standards of delivery.

School council elections

In one school where participation is strongly embedded within the culture, meaningful school council elections take place. Young people represent their class and work well across year boundaries. There is no senior member of staff present in school council meetings and the agenda is set by the pupils. The council is given considerable autonomy in how it runs, and the head teacher receives informal feedback regularly from the chair.

A number of young people use the experiences gained to progress to other areas of work, such as the national youth parliament. Two Year 13 pupils sit as associate governors on the full governing body with access to all papers including budgets and the service delivery plan. Young people are actively involved in establishing priorities and have been involved in drawing up shortlists for new teaching appointments.

Through their involvement in the school council, young people are gaining important skills such as negotiating, decision making, prioritising and effective communication.

Support group for young people with Diabetes

Young people aged 11-18 work in partnership with the health trust. They are actively involved in improving provision for young people with diabetes. A support group involves young people in a range of positive ways. The group was formed in direct response to a request from a diabetes forum for young people.

The young people have developed young people friendly literature relating to their health condition. The young people have also raised awareness of diabetes with peers, teachers and support workers through delivering awareness training and attending national conferences. The young people have also advised the NHS trust on the restructuring of provision for young people in clinics.

Youth Council

Seven years ago, a group of young people set up a youth council that reflects the way that their local authority worked. They elected a youth mayor. The mayor was recruited through the use of voting booths in a fast food restaurant. This ensured that young people from a variety of backgrounds were involved. In addition, young people from the looked after children forum, youth clubs, schools, social services and housing projects were contacted.

The youth council then recognised that they needed to broaden their base and needed to take action in the local community. Therefore, the youth council employed workers to promote local youth forums in each of the valley areas.

As the Young People's Partnership was established, another opportunity to strengthen young people's participation came about. The partnership has been able

to influence organisations and departments who do not traditionally work with young people. This has made a difference to cross-directorate working and other professionals now consult with young people for the first time.

Local political support for the youth council is critical in taking the project forward. The youth mayors have their names displayed on a board in the council chamber. This gives official approval to the youth council and shows public support for young people's ideals. The youth council developed quickly and was influential, even in its early days. However, as young people moved on the forum found it difficult at times to sustain itself.

The strength of the youth council and its processes lie in its flexibility and willingness to adapt to policy changes and the needs of young people.

Modelling

One group of young people involved in a consultation on improvements to a MUGA¹² and skate park area used models to illustrate their ideas. Young people took part in a modelling exercise in which recycled materials were used to sculpt their own designs for the MUGA and to contribute ideas to improve the facility. Young people produced a range of artefacts and drawings to present to the local community about the type of facilities they would like to see.

The sculptures reflected the different needs of the young people who made them. A number of young people were keen for equipment for activities such as ramps and skate bars. Others were modelling seating areas, quiet spots and bins. Young people contributed ideas to improve their community and produced evidence of how they would like to see the project move forward.

The young people found the consultation exercise very useful because it helped them contribute ideas about their community and how to improve it in a way that made them feel confident. The process enabled young people to influence other young people to behave positively.

Newsletter

One local authority youth service is developing an improved information service to young people. An element of this is the Youth Participation newsletter, one of which has already been published. The aim of the newsletter is to inform young people of opportunities to participate and influence services. This is an attractive, bilingual, informative and professional newsletter.

Sports and disabled young people

Young disabled people (dyspraxia, adhd¹³, learning difficulties and sensory impairments) participate in a project with Learning Support Assistants, Family Support, the Sports Council and physiotherapists. At the beginning of each term, young people work with staff to identify their own learning goals and what activities

¹² Multi Use Games Area

¹³ Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder

they will take part in to achieve their aims. Examples of learning goals include flexibility, ball handling or being open to physical closeness for contact sports. The young people make a positive contribution and give staff information which is considered at the end of each term.