



# Children in Scotland

**The participation and engagement of  
children and young people:  
Our principles and guidelines**

## Introduction



These principles and guidelines have been developed to inform the way we involve children and young people in our work. Our vision is that all children and young people in Scotland have an equal chance to flourish. We cannot achieve this without actively listening to their voices and responding to what they tell us.

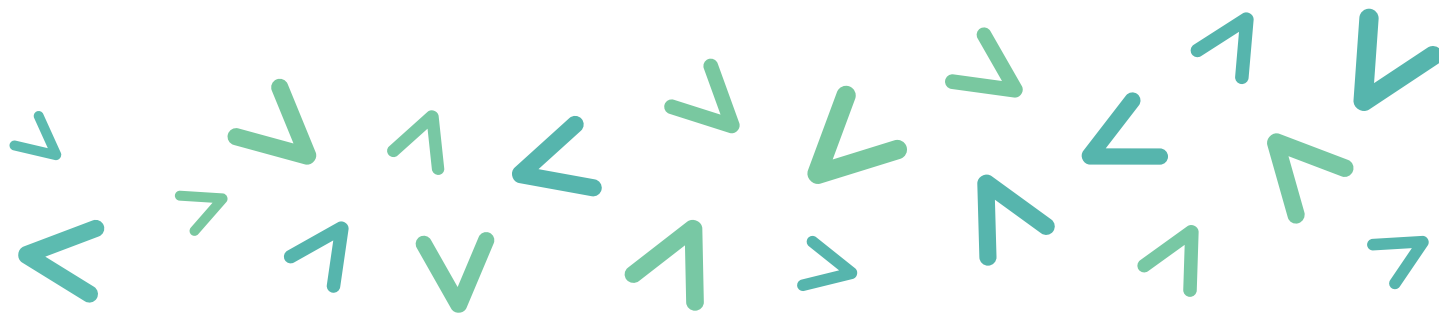
In line with how rights are described by the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, our goal is to engage children and young people in meaningful, ongoing dialogue and enable them to have effective and fulfilling participation in all areas of our work. This will help ensure their voices influence the decisions and practices of policy makers and practitioners.

The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child describes participation as:

“...Ongoing processes, which include information sharing and dialogue between children and adults based on mutual respect, and in which children can learn how their views and those of adults are taken into account and shape the outcome of such processes”.



Leaders of Learning Summit Day 2015



## Sharing our learning

We are happy to share these principles and guidelines with organisations who may be engaging with children and young people in their decision-making. We encourage other organisations to reflect upon their own practice.

We would highlight that these principles and guidelines have been developed to support Children in Scotland's organisational practice and other organisations must consider them in relation to their own context.

## Six key stages

In all participation and engagement work, children and young people should be actively listened to, treated fairly and have their opinions respected and taken seriously.

Participation of children and young people is an important mechanism to ensure that, as an organisation, we are listening and communicating to our members the views and perspectives of children and young people on a wide variety of issues, coupled with the best available evidence of what works for supporting children and their families.

These principles and guidelines can be applied at all times, from start to finish of any work involving children and young people, and have been designed to cover the following six stages:

### 1. Planning and coordination

### 2. Inclusion

### 3. Child protection

### 4. Delivery

### 5. Communication

### 6. Feedback, evaluation and next steps

We acknowledge that achieving best practice in all of our participation work will be an ongoing process and there will be barriers and challenges to overcome. However, we will strive to ensure these principles and guidelines underpin everything we do.

This is the first version of these guidelines. Our aim is to update them regularly in line with feedback from our members, peers, children and young people and learning from our work throughout the year.

# 1.

## Planning and coordination



Participation and engagement with children and young people should begin at the project design stage. They should be included in the planning and coordination of activity from the start.

**Remember to ensure child protection measures are in place.**

For all commissioned work, Children in Scotland must ensure that the commissioning body has an effective, staff-wide child protection policy.

Safeguarding of participants must be considered in advance and discussed with the leadership team to ensure age-appropriate measures are in place.



Changing our World Selection Day 2017

**Always seek consent.** We must provide children and young people with a tailored information and consent form ahead of starting the engagement work. This will be project-specific and will reflect the capacity of participants. From participation to the use of images, consent may vary. Consider the **5rights approach**.

**Ensure the participation activity is necessary and meaningful.** It should never just be a quick tick-box exercise.

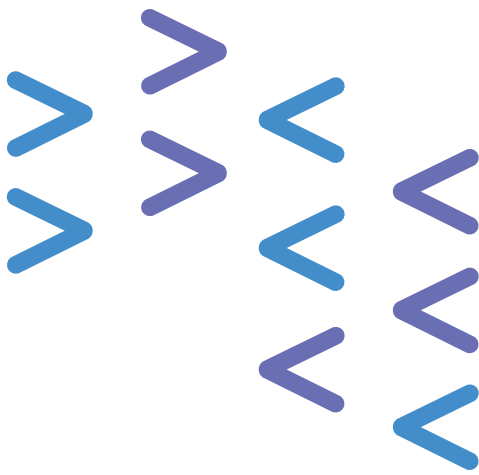
**Build in sufficient time** to plan, develop and resource a meaningful consultation/engagement process.

**Develop a clear and concise project plan.** This should include robust risk assessment, taking into account the specific needs of children and young people.

**Include providing feedback in an accessible form** during initial planning. Ensure there is time and resource allocated to this.

**Ensure the whole team is involved and informed from the early stages of a project.** This includes the project team, as well as other Children in Scotland colleagues.

**Plan the method to suit the needs and interests of the individual children and young people involved.** Consider creative and engaging activities that account for different learning styles.



Work with children and young people to **co-design all participation and engagement activities** that they are involved in, whenever feasible.

**If working in schools or a youth setting, allow enough time to coordinate with the staff there, to ensure they are fully informed and committed.** Avoid unnecessary overload for the children and young people and their schools, particularly at crucial times of the year such as during revision and exam periods.

**Ensure children and young people have the information they need to be able to make informed choices** about whether they want to be involved and if so how.

**Research the support needs of the group of young people taking part.** Focus on identifying and overcoming barriers to participation.

**Consider fully the social and emotional impact of taking part.** Ensure that the team involved have considered and put in place meaningful support for the young people throughout and beyond the duration of the project. Bear in mind this may include linking in to other services as appropriate and working with support staff who already have an established relationship with the participants.

**Ensure that all staff have a realistic understanding of the challenges involved.** It can be difficult to engage marginalised and vulnerable children and young people. Sufficient resources should be available from the outset.

**Consider the impact on staff undertaking this work,** including lone working and emotional impact. Ensure that measures and resource to support staff are included at the planning stage and in project budgets.

**Ensure the participation activity is necessary and meaningful** – it should never just be a quick tick-box exercise.

**Use children and young people's experiences and views from other research to inform project design.** What do children and young people say about their needs or preferences?

Ensure costs and additional expenses, such as travel, refreshments and optional gifts to support participation, are included in **project budgets**.



Making Space Conference 2016

## 2.

### Inclusion

When conducting any participation and engagement work, the group should be as inclusive as possible.

Develop and maintain strong links with organisations that can support children and young people to participate.

**Actively seek a mixed demographic for participation and engagement work.** Take into consideration age, gender identity, ethnicity, geographical location and the additional support needs of participants.

**Ensure any barriers to participation are removed and extra support is provided to enable every child or young person to participate fully.** The planning stage should always include discussions with the school staff/ youth worker, parent/carer and the children and young people themselves about extra support or adaptations that might be required.

**Make sure all information is presented in an accessible way,** which children and young people can understand. Avoid using long words and acronyms.

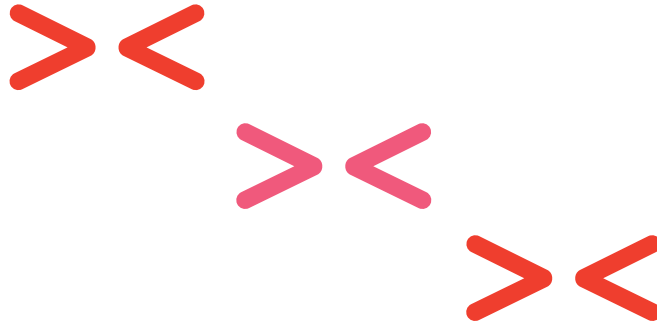
**Always consider religious festivals and how this may impact on potential to participate.** Consult a festivals calendar and plan accordingly.





# 3.

## Child protection



Awareness of child rights and meaningful participation complement and strengthen child protection practices.

Every staff member must have basic child protection training.

Everyone working with children and young people on behalf of Children in Scotland must be familiar with the child protection policy and accompanying practice guidelines.

Make sure the following steps have been taken in any participation and engagement work with children and young people:

**Permission to photograph and capture film footage of children and young people participating in work must be sought from the outset.**

**Information and consent forms should be adapted to capture the specific nature of the individual project work and should be signed off by a member of the leadership team.**

**Appoint an on-call Designated Child Protection Officer and ensure all staff are aware of who this is and how to contact them.**

**Ensure every member of staff has appropriate clearance to work with children and young people.** All staff who are going to be working directly with children and young people as part of their normal pattern of work must be a member of the PVG scheme.

**Any adults assisting on participation projects should be working alongside a member of staff who is a current member of the PVG scheme.**

Alternatively, if they will be working directly with children and young people unsupervised as part of their regular duties, they will be required to apply to membership of the PVG scheme before commencing work.

**All new staff should receive a specific induction to Children in Scotland's participation and engagement work.**

**Ensure appropriate risk assessment is completed prior to all participation and engagement work.**

**Be aware of appropriate use of social media in participation work.** While working with children and young people, staff should not engage children and young people on social media sites such as personal Facebook profiles. However, public facing social media tools such as Twitter can be used appropriately by staff to engage with children and young people as part of specific project work.

**When emailing a child or young person, copy in another staff member.**

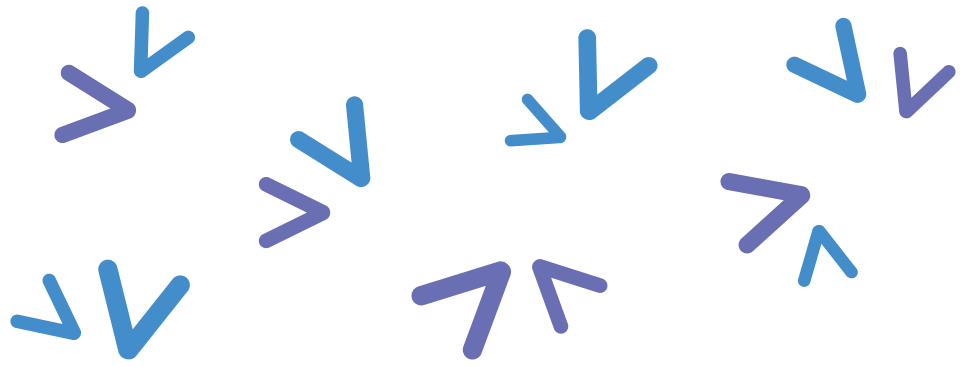
**Use call forwarding or a work mobile when communicating with children and young people.** Avoid giving out a personal mobile number.

**External contracted staff should receive clear guidance about data protection and storage of materials.**

**Ensure you are clearly identifiable as a staff member when liaising with young people.** All Children in Scotland staff should wear their staff ID badge when undertaking participation and engagement work.

# 4.

## Delivery



At the start of any session, always make it clear to the children and young people that there are no right or wrong answers when being consulted about their views.

The purpose behind any participation activity should also be clearly explained to the children and young people at the outset.

**Allow time and flexibility for methods to be adapted if initial approaches are not working well.**

**Be realistic and honest.** Children and young people should know the difference their participation can make.

**Be clear about involvement.** Children and young people should know that their participation is voluntary and that they can withdraw at any point. If a child or young person wants or needs to stop participating at any point, make this as easy as possible for them.

**Ensure that the children participating understand** that their views will be anonymised and that their data will be held securely.

**Take time to create a safe space** by establishing ground rules together to ensure that there is a shared understanding of mutual respect — encourage the participants to lead.

**Be non-judgemental and independent,** listening carefully and compassionately to the contributions made by every child or young person.

**Be practical and aware of appropriateness.** Wear comfortable and appropriate clothes for working with children and young people.



Food, Families, Futures 2016



Changing our World Selection Day 2017





**Ensure appropriate venues.** The physical space we work in should feel safe, comfortable and informal.

**Remember to reimburse any costs incurred by the children and young people** who are participating on the day e.g. travel costs. Be prepared with enough cash.

**The approach should be friendly, but with highly professional standards.** Use first name terms when engaging with children and young people.

**Be creative in your approach.** Staff should design creative methods to work with children and young people and maximise engagement.

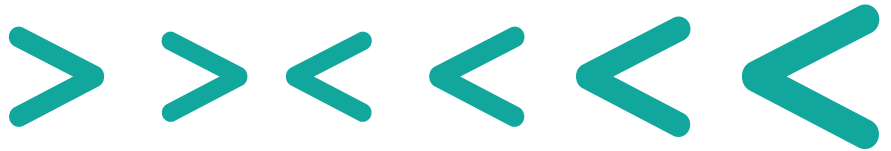
**Take time to develop the children and young people's understanding of choice and decision-making.** Ensure they feel relaxed and able to share their views.

**The voices of children and young people should be recorded honestly and accurately with the exact words they have used.** There should be no paraphrasing or interpreting of their words. Any other adults supporting participation and engagement work — such as interpreters, advocates or associates — should be careful to ensure the views recorded or reported are genuinely those of the child or young person.

**Do not assume children and young people understand.** Create an ethos that encourages children and young people to ask questions and allows staff to check understanding.

# 5.

## Communication



Good, effective communication underpins everything we do. All communication in participation and engagement work should be accessible, clear and accurate.

**Ask children and young people for advice and guidance on their preferred methods of communication.**

**Make discussion topics, information and key questions clear and easy to understand.**

**Be clear about the process.** Explain to children and young people that when writing up the results of a consultation as a report, editing may be required, although every effort will be made to capture accurately what they have said. Ideally, particularly in cases where children and young people are contributing their own written content, involve them in the editing process and seek their approval of the final draft before sign off.

**Be open to discussion about the appropriate use of social media for the purpose of participation and engagement work.**



Children in Scotland Annual Conference 2017

# 6.

## Feedback, evaluation and next steps



No project is complete until the children and young people know how their voices have been listened to, what impact their contribution has made, what has happened as a result of what they said, and why.

**Make results and reports easy to access and understand.** This could be in the form of a report or other creative methods such as a blog or short film.

**Always give children and young people recognition and thanks for their contribution.**

A letter, certificate or where possible formal accreditation would be appropriate.

**Children and young people should have the opportunity to provide feedback.** They should be encouraged to say what they think about consultation results and decisions made and to ask questions.

**Provide a variety of methods for children and young people to give feedback.**



Food, Families, Futures 2016

**Monitor and evaluate how successful an approach has been and share these findings with staff.** Use evaluation responses from children and young people to identify the methods that worked well and those that didn't. These findings should influence the direction of future work.

**Build opportunities to measure the impact of engagement work on individual participants, their wider community and national policy.** Use this learning to develop future project plans.

**Work in partnership with the wider children's sector community to share good practice in participation and engagement.**

**Conduct an appropriate de-brief with staff.** Ensure an opportunity for all staff to have a debrief meeting with a senior manager at the end of a project.

**Record voices and perspectives.** Ensure that voices from each project have been entered into the Children in Scotland participation and engagement evidence bank.

**Collaborate with other teams internally, members and/or partner organisations.** By sharing progress and good practice, it will be possible to lobby for change based on best available evidence and the specific views and perspectives of children and young people, ensuring that the participation work is employed to its full potential to effect change.



## Further information

You can find further details about Children in Scotland's participation and engagement work on our website at [www.childreninscotland.org.uk](http://www.childreninscotland.org.uk).

Please contact Elaine Kerridge if you have any further queries about our participation work or these principles and guidelines.

## About Children in Scotland

Giving all children in Scotland an equal chance to flourish is at the heart of everything we do.

By bringing together a network of people working with and for children, alongside children and young people themselves, we offer a broad, balanced and independent voice. We create solutions, provide support and develop positive change across all areas affecting children in Scotland.

We do this by listening, gathering evidence, and applying and sharing our learning, while always working to uphold children's rights. Our range of knowledge and expertise means we can provide trusted support on issues as diverse as the people we work with and the varied lives of children and families in Scotland.



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