

Good Practice guide for ensuring Effective Parent and Carer Participation and Co-production



2016- 2020

(A key priority in the Learning Improvement Strategy)

Introduction

This guidance is primarily aimed at all staff who work with parents and carers.

Parent/Carer organisations across Bracknell Forest have contributed to this guidance.

The guidance offers a source of information relating to the national and local agenda on participation. It is a practical guide to involving parents and carers in participation, and consultation and co-production.

Why is parent/carer participation important?

Parent and carers can help identify the problems frequently experienced by families with disabled children and young people and those with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND). This knowledge is useful to all organisations and individual practitioners, enabling them to develop and improve service delivery, so that the resulting local provision better meets the needs of local families.

Including parents and carers in planning and decision-making processes has proved beneficial to Local Authorities and Health professionals when developing services in their areas that are essential for disabled children and young people, those with SEN and their families. By working together, and recognising each other's expert knowledge, we can reach informed decisions which are better understood by all. Involving parents and carers can build confidence and trust between parents and professional services. It should also lead to better use of time and financial resources.



What is participation?

Participation, consultation and co-production are terms that are often used interchangeably. For the purposes of this guide, we have explained the differences between information, consultation, participation and co-production below:

Information:

Effective communication is important for all facets of our work, but is absolutely essential to the success of building relationships with parents and carers. Well-informed parents will feel more confident about local services and will be empowered to make appropriate decisions for their children and families. Knowledgeable parents are better placed to contribute to consultation, participation and co-production activities (as described below), which help services to understand what works best for disabled children and young people with SEN.

Consultation:

A step up from simply giving information, consultation requires a two-way communication. Practitioners may, for example, consult with parents and carers on existing services, seeking their views on how provisions can be improved, or when proposing changes to the way resources are delivered. True consultation happens when parents and carers are informed about proposals, and invited to contribute their ideas and/or raise any concerns, before final decisions are made.

Consultation information can be used to inform good practice, to shape recommendations for improving services and provision, to highlight needs and service gaps, or as a way of affirming decisions.

Consultation can be undertaken in many ways from surveys to focus groups to events and activities. Consultation is a good way of encouraging people to have their say and provides a pathway for 'active involvement' in other structures.

Consideration needs to be given to ensuring feedback is given to participants about the results of the consultation and also where and how the information has been used.

Where it has not been possible to make changes in light of parental views, the consultation response should explain why.

Many parents do not have the time to become involved in higher level strategic activities. However, all parents will have opinions about the services their children and young people receive. Consultation is an important and relatively simple way of capturing a wide range of views.



Participation:

Participation is more than just simply being consulted or taking part in an activity or event. It refers to a process whereby people are 'actively involved' in identifying needs, exploring solutions, making decisions and planning the way forward for projects, organisations and the wider community.

Effective parent/carer participation happens when parents and carers have conversations with, and work alongside professionals, to share knowledge and information which will help to develop and improve services. These conversations benefit everyone, ensuring that local services are responsive to the needs of local families, and that resources are not wasted on developing and delivering facilities which will not effectively meet these needs.

Co-Production:

'Co-production' means involving parents and carers at the highest level of service planning and decision-making. It requires trust, honesty and transparency, clear and open communication and, above all, a commitment that each participant's contribution is equally valued and respected.

In its essence, co-production is a dynamic group process and happens when there is a meaningful balance of representation between parents and practitioners, all on an equal footing, in the planning or decision-making forum. In co-production, parents and carers do not just represent the experiences of services users, but they assume a shared responsibility to help shape future experiences and be an active part of delivering the solutions.

Co-production happens when parents, carers and professionals jointly agree desired outcomes and jointly produce (co-produce) any recommendations, plans or actions.

Co-production is an approach that builds upon meaningful participation (as described above). It assumes that effective information, consultation and participation are embedded.

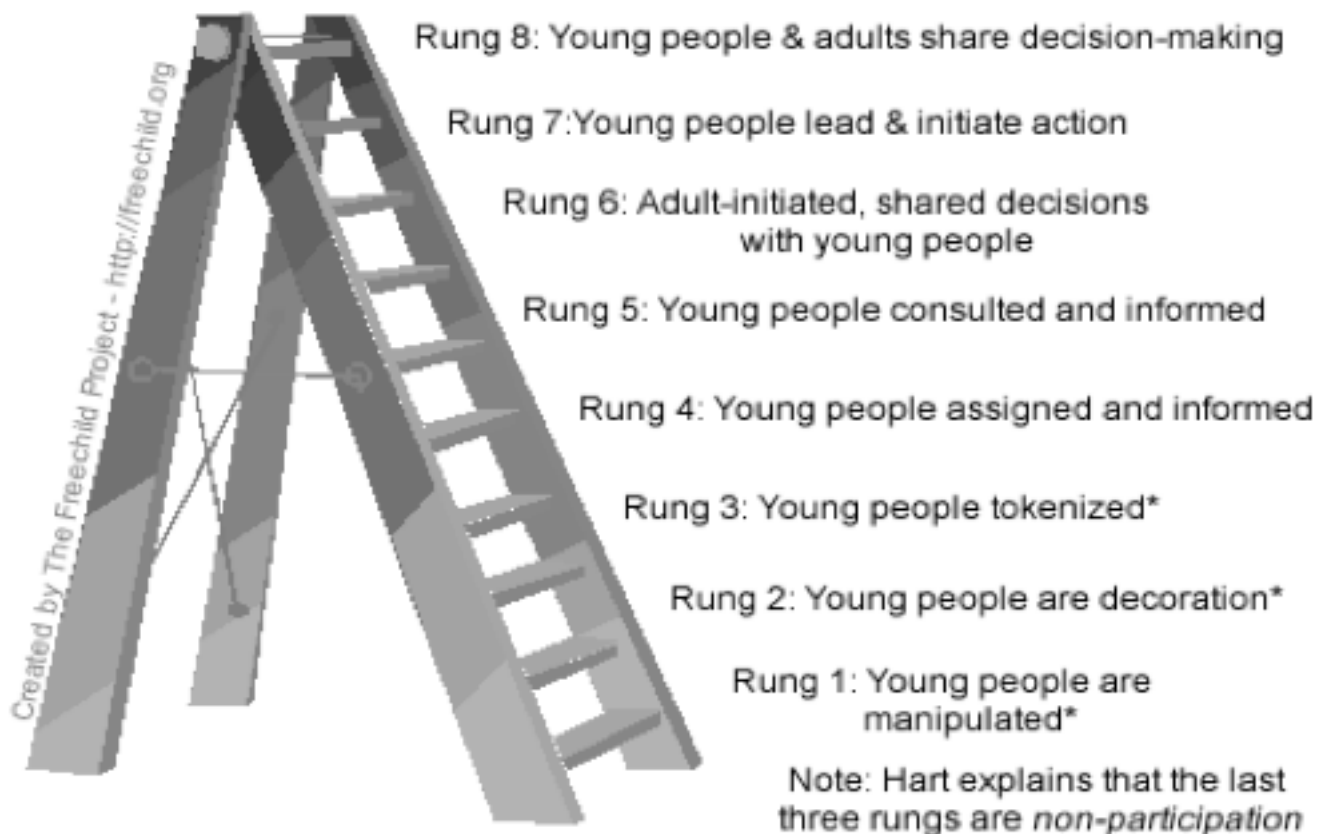


Ladder of participation

Throughout the participation agenda, Roger Hart's 'Ladder of Participation' is often used to explain the different approaches and practices that organisations take in involving children and young people in decision making. This can be applied just as well to parent carer participation. (see appendix 3)
The true measure of whether co-production has really been successful is when a date for a review of the project / piece of work is set and co-evaluation occurs.

Fig 1

Roger Hart's Ladder of Young People's Participation



Adapted from Hart, R. (1992). *Children's Participation from Tokenism to Citizenship*.
Florence: UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre.

Making participation easier for parents and carers

Good practice suggests that there should be at least two parent/carers representatives on each decision making Board.

How you can make meetings accessible to parents/carers

- Parents/carers are often prevented from participating in meetings because of their times and the locations where they are held. The suggested good practice is for meetings to be held between 10am and 2pm (avoiding the school run) on a weekday, avoiding school holidays, with only occasional meetings to be held during the evening and weekend.
- It is important that families are given all information necessary before the meeting in a format that is best for them. Information should be clear and easy to understand and should not use acronyms/ jargon.
- Understand that parents and carers have very busy lives and don't always have time to read and fully digest lengthy documents prior to the meeting. Summarise these during the meeting prior to discussion.
- To ensure transparency and accountability, professionals should ensure there is an appropriate paper trail e.g. agenda, minutes of the meeting. This will enable parents who cannot attend meetings to be kept informed.
- Feedback from meetings is essential and parents/carers should be informed about what has or has not changed and the reasons behind the decisions. If professionals fail to respond to parents/carers they will become disillusioned with the process and may not engage in the future.
- When parents/carers are invited to meetings they may incur expenses. Decide beforehand if reasonable expenses are to be paid

An expenses policy is required which specifies the occasions when parent/ carers can claim expenses and the appropriate rates.

Remember

We must remember that parents and carers volunteer their own time to support partnership working. They have very busy lives, with other commitments and responsibilities. To actively encourage and support parents and carers to participate, practitioners need always to be mindful of the practical barriers to parent carer participation (e.g. times of meetings). We must also be aware of other factors (most of which would be covered by good planning and basic courtesies) that may significantly affect how a parent or carer feels as well as their ability and/or willingness to participate fully.

Paying attention to the basics - such as identifying a contact person for parent carer representatives, ensuring full introductions in meetings, ensuring parents and carers have the same information as other partners in advance of meetings, offering support and additional explanation when needed – will help parents and carers to feel welcome, valued and supported. This can make all the difference!

Conclusions

There is no “right” way to introduce participation. The starting points for children, young people, and parents/carers are different in each case, based upon what they want and the type of participation required. Participation is not created simply by modifying existing structures – it entails a change of attitude and outlook.

Most services in some way are expected to support and develop participation, however many are afraid that what they do will be seen as ‘tokenistic’ and false by both their users and other organisations.

All organisations have to start somewhere and in this document we try to point you in the right direction by giving you some general guidelines to follow, and dismiss some of the myths!



Appendix 1

Useful Tips for Co-production

1. Be clear about what you want as an organisation, and be open about the extent and possibility of shared power and decision making.
2. The best starting place for co-production is at the beginning. Right at the start of a piece of work, consider who should be involved AND involve them immediately.
3. Involve the people whose families use the services under discussion or review.
4. Come to the table without a fixed agenda and build that agenda with those involved.
5. Decide together what you are going to do, how you are going to work together and agree the desired outcomes. Wherever possible, stick to the work plan.
6. Be true to the aims of co-production! Remember, parents and carers offer a unique perspective and insight. Parent carer participation is helpful!
7. Be open to persuasion and challenge. Be willing to change direction and/or to review decisions. Use the free expertise and knowledge shared by parents and carers to make positive changes.
8. Make sure that everything in the co-production process is equally accessible to everyone taking part. Information, minutes etc. should be circulated to all.
9. Actively facilitate discussions, ensuring that everyone who wishes to has an opportunity to speak, and that others listen. Take steps to ensure that no one person or group monopolises the conversation.
10. Be ready to offer additional support and explanation to help individuals to participate. Everyone can contribute given the right support.
11. Be organised and prepare well. Don't waste everyone's valuable time!
12. Avoid making impromptu decisions and having key discussions outside of planned meetings as part of "everyday office life" that parents / carers cannot possibly be a part of.

Appendix 2

Practitioners Good Practice Checklist

1. Are there at least two places for parents/carer representatives?

It is good practice to have parents who have children of different ages, different needs/disabilities, and represent different groups. They can also support each other.

2. Have the representative parents/carers received information for the meetings in the most accessible format for them?

This may be via e-mail or by post. Papers will need to be printed off for parent/carers ready for the meetings and sent out well in advance.

3. Is there an identified key professional who has responsibility to support the parent/carer representatives?

These key professionals can:

- Meet parents/carers beforehand to answer any questions and discuss the agenda.
- Explain the purpose of the meeting, terms of reference, objectives and overall structures.
- Outline what the group can and cannot do.
- Let parents/carers know about members of the group.
- Explain how the meeting is to be run i.e. formally or informal discussion.

- Discuss what to do if they are unable to attend.
- Identify any training the parents/carers may benefit from to help them in the meetings.
- Deal with paying any expenses to the parents/carers.
- Thank the parents/carers for giving their time.
- Ensure appropriate feedback is given to any parents who give their time.

4. Are the meetings planned at a time which enables parents/carers to attend?

The National Standard is for meetings to be held between 10am and 2pm (avoiding the school run) on a weekday, avoid school holidays and occasional meetings to be held evenings and weekends.

5. Is the language used in all the meetings and in all paperwork jargon free and easy to understand?

Parents may need an explanation of terms / abbreviations.

6. Have parents/carers received reasonable out of pocket expenses for attending strategic meetings?

Reasonable expenses include travel costs, photocopying/printing costs and any other out of pocket expense incurred to enable parents to attend the meeting.

Appendix 3

Ladder of participation

The Ladder of Participation is based on 8 levels. The levels show an incremental increase in active involvement, level 1 being the lowest in terms of service users having very little influence on decisions to level 8 illustrating true involvement. Hart felt that the first three rungs were non participation. The ladder is shown with slight modification to make it applicable to parent carers. The ladder will help your organisation determine where you are in terms of participation and help you focus and improve your approach if desired.¹

Degrees of participation³

Level 8: User-initiated, shared decisions with adults

This happens when projects or programmes are initiated by Parents/Carers and decision-making is shared between Parents/Carers and the organisation. These projects empower Parents/Carers while at the same time enabling them to access support and expertise of the Local Authority and/or its agency partners.

Level 7: User-initiated and directed

This step is when Parents/Carers initiate and direct a project or programme. Local Authority and/or its' agency partners are involved only in a supportive role.

Level 6: Local Authority-initiated, shared decisions with users

Occurs when projects or programme are initiated by Local Authority and/or its' agency partners but the decision-making is shared with the Parents/Carers.

Level 5: Consulted and informed

This happens when Parents/Carers give advice on projects or programs which are designed and run by Local Authority and/or its' agency partners. Parents/Carers are informed about how their input will be used and the outcomes of the decisions made by the Local Authority and/or its' agency partners.

Level 4: Assigned but informed

This is where Parents/Carers are assigned a specific role and informed about how and why they are being involved.

Level 3: Tokenism

When Parents/Carers appear to be given a voice, but in fact have little or no choice about what they do or how they participate.

Level 2: Decoration

Happens when Parents/Carers are used to help or “bolster” a cause in a relatively indirect way, although the Local Authority and/or its' agency partners do not pretend that the cause is inspired by Parents/Carers.

Level 1: Manipulation

Happens where the Local Authority and/or its' agency partners use their Parents/Carers to support causes and pretend that the causes are inspired by the Parents/Carers.

¹ Please note: It is important not to view participation as a hierarchical model where organisations feel that their involvement of service users is judged as not good enough if it is not high enough on the ladder. Organisations need to start from a point that is realistic for them and then develop participation as their collective confidence, trust and skills increase.

²(Adapted from Hart, Roger (1992) Children's participation from tokenism to citizenship.)

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Nepali

यस प्रचारको सक्षेपं वा सार निचोड चाहिं दिइने छ, ठूलो अक्षरमा, ब्रेल वा क्यासेट सून्नको लागी । अरु भाषाको नक्कल पनि हासिल गर्न सकिने छ । कृपया सम्पर्क गनुहोला ०१३४४ ३५२००० ।

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