Walking or Talking Participation?

Evidencing the impact of direct participation with children and young people in the development of departmental policies, strategies, legislation and services.

20 October 2014
PRESENTING THE RESEARCH

Paula Keenan

Researcher
INTRODUCTION

PURPOSE

• Do departments have processes for dealing with input from children and young people? How do they record their views? Do they give feedback? Can they provide evidence that the views of children and young people have had an impact / led to change?

• When a process is evident what are the enabling supportive factors?

• When it is not evident what barriers are in place?

• What examples of good practice can be identified?

METHODOLOGY

• Semi-structured interviews with Children’s Champions in all departments

• Facilitated workshop with NICCY Youth Panel
FINDINGS

SYSTEMS

• No department was able to provide evidence of recording, analysing, giving weight to the views of young people, evaluating or providing feedback on the outcomes of engagement – **SYSTEMATICALLY**

• Some good practice in relation to individual engagements

ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITY

• Wide range of activity – strategy/policy consultation but also informal listening, creative ways of involving children, long-term processes and pre-consultation
COMMUNICATION AND CO-ORDINATION

• Apparent lack of co-ordination of and communication about engaging children and young people – both within and across departments

• Most departments had no way for officials to share outcomes and experience of engagements with colleagues and no individual within the department to hold an overview of engagement activity

• Some had informal discussions with colleagues
FINDINGS

ROLE OF OFMDFM

• Interviewees said they wanted support from OFMDFM in relation to: expertise / guidance; Central co-ordinating role; Facilitation of engagements

• Caveats – some officials said they didn’t want something imposed by OFMDFM; that responsibility needed to be pushed back to departments and that OFMDFM needed to improve relationships with other department

• OFMDFM said they would have arrangements for supporting departments to engage in place by April 2014
FINDINGS

FACTORS THAT ENABLE EFFECTIVE ENGAGEMENT

• Being present with the support of expert facilitators
• Undertaking pre-consultation
• Young people being prepared
• Good communication within the department
• Having ready access to young people through funded groups
• Enthusiasm from officials
• Having time to focus on young people and consultations
• Ministerial leadership
FINDINGS

BARRIERS TO EFFECTIVE ENGAGEMENT

• Lack of practical support
• Attitudes
• Processes and procedures
• Time and workloads
• Responsibility of arms length bodies
• Fear of disadvantaging adults
FINDINGS

EVIDENCE OF IMPACT

• Very few departments were able to provide concrete evidence of change resulting from children and young people’s input
• Many officials readily cited the benefits of participation
• Some referred to the difficulty of attributing change to particular input
• Absence of systems for recording and analysing views, evaluating and feeding back on engagements – is lack of evidence *FAILURE TO DELIVER* or *FAILURE TO RECORD*?
• Positive examples:
  DoE – Road safety strategy
  DEL – Training allowances on ESF programmes
  DHSSPS – Fostering regulations
  DoJ – Autism guide for criminal justice professionals
  DE – individual service user
FINDINGS

OTHER EXAMPLES OF GOOD PRACTICE

• Feedback: DHSSPS / DoE / OFMdFM / DoJ
• Evaluation: OFMDFM
• On-going engagement: DEL
• Documentation: DARD / DoJ
• Support structures: DoE / DoJ
RECOMMENDATIONS

Until robust systems are in place it will not be possible to verify the true impact that engaging with children and young people is having and the NI Executive will not be able to fully account for meeting UNCRC obligations and section 75 duties.

Commendable that some departments are actively and enthusiastically engaging with children and young people – some are developing good participative practice.

1. All Government departments need to develop effective systems for engaging children and young people in order to fulfil their duties under the UNCRC and to ensure that they are in a position to accurately report that they are meeting their obligations.
RECOMMENDATIONS

2. The Office of First Minister and Deputy First Minister should consider the findings of this report in taking forward plans to support departments to establish robust mechanisms for engaging children and young people in public decision making. Particular attention could usefully be paid to recording and analysing their views, evaluating the effectiveness of the process and providing feedback to participants on the outcomes and impact of the engagements.

3. In particular the OFMDFM should ensure that standardised methods for evaluating engagements with children and young people include a clear mechanism for identifying changes that have been made as a result of the engagement.
4. In order to ensure that children and young people are involved in developing the current plans to support departments in relation to engaging children and young people in public decision making, OFMDFM should engage with NICCY before arrangements are finalised.

5. In order to ensure a consistent and coordinated approach both within and across departments, each department should identify someone in a policy role to lead on engaging children and young people. This person should work closely with the Children’s Champion, advise officials on effective methodologies and collate the recording, evaluation and impact of engagements.

6. In order to identify those policies which have most relevance to the lives of children and young people departments should carry out a Child Rights Impact Assessment.