CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH TO ADDRESS SEXUAL VIOLENCE

Ethical working paper

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Introduction

This paper aims to:

1. explain the context and rationale for the commitment of the *International Centre: researching child sexual exploitation, violence and trafficking* (hereafter referred to as the 'International Centre') to children and young people's participation

2. outline the meaning of 'children and young people's participation' within the centre

3. outline the potential value of developing children and young people's participation in the work of the centre

4. describe the underlying principles of the International Centre's approach to involving children and young people

5. explain the ethical framework which structures children and young people and supporting organisations involvement with the International Centre's work

The paper and its contents are open and subject to on-going review as part of our commitment to reflective practice. This paper will be circulated and reviewed annually (May/June) and final changes agreed at the annual International centre away day.

Context

The International Centre is committed to increasing understanding of, and improving responses to, child sexual exploitation, violence and trafficking in local, national and international contexts. This is achieved through:

- academic rigour and research excellence
- collaborative and partnership based approaches to applied social research
- meaningful and ethical engagement of children and young people
- active dissemination and evidence-based engagement in theory, policy and practice

Staff at the International Centre work collaboratively in teams with internal and external staff on applied research, evaluation, consultancy and training. We prioritise a focus on children and young people's participation, taking this seriously in all aspects of our work.

Since 2006, when the centre was established, the International Centre has had an explicit commitment to involving children and young people within its applied research agenda in roles that extend beyond solely that of a traditional research participant. This work has aimed to involve children and young people in a range of roles which have varied according to the remit and resources of projects. This work

continues to develop but examples of roles that children and young people have undertaken in the centre to date include:

- advisory or steering group members
- informing the International Centre's research agenda
- peer-researchers
- research interns
- supporting data analysis
- supporting the development of research recommendations
- co-producing research outputs (films; reports; websites; conference presentations)
- co-delivering dissemination and policy influencing exercises.

Key definitions and principles

The International Centre's Children and Young People Participation Strategy is based on an understanding of children and young people's participation as: **the right of all children and young people, to be involved and influential in decision-making about issues which affect their lives and those of their communities, in accordance with their evolving capacity** (*in line with United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and The Children's Act 1989/2004*). Key aspects of the International Centre's working understanding of children's and young people's participation are outlined below:
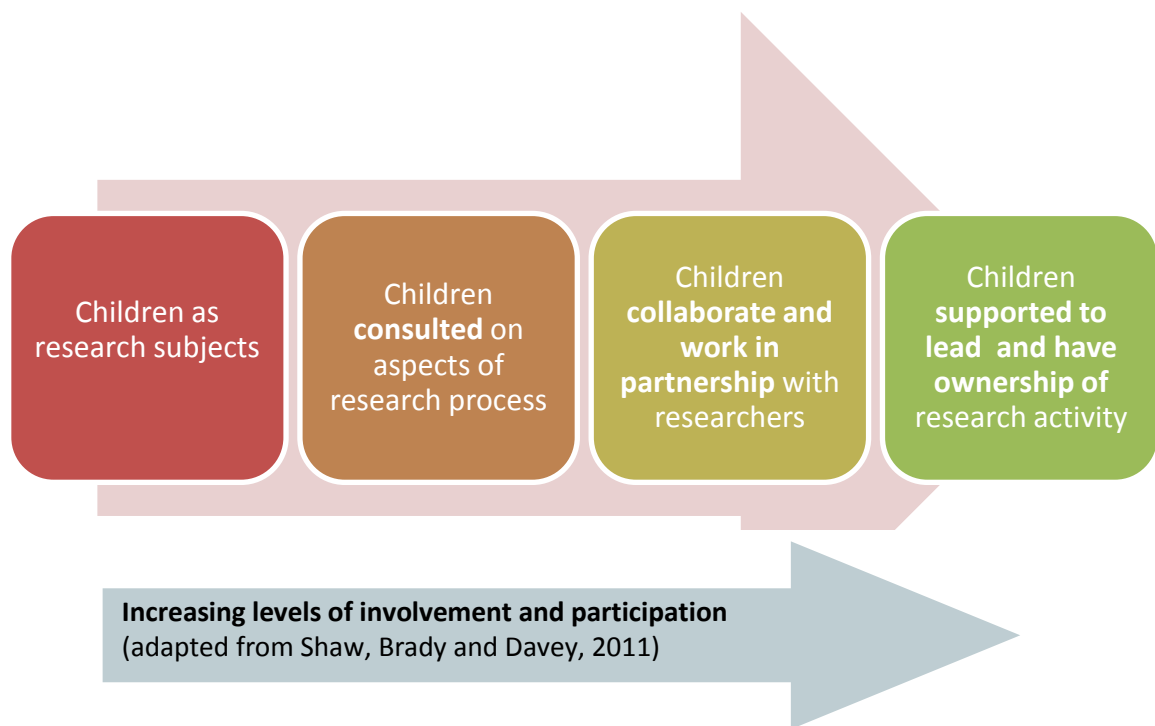
- Children and young people's participation relates to both **children and young people as individuals, and as groups or constituencies.**

- Children and young people's participation relates to **different forms and types of decision-making**. This could potentially include decisions made within individual, project, local, national or international contexts. In the specific context of the International Centre, this has included decisions concerning:

  - **research activities** (e.g. planning or design of particular tools; involvement in consultations, data collection or analysis activities),
  - **projects** (e.g. project planning and design, governance or dissemination outputs and events) , and to a lesser degree
  - **the International Centre** (e.g. feeding into development of International Centre research agenda, funding activities and dissemination)

The potential to involve children and young people in decision making about the **research institute or University** is recognised but has not been made concrete to date.

- Children and young people's participation can occur at different (though overlapping) **levels of participation**. These can be broadly summarised as *consultative; collaborative* and *child-led* and are expanded upon below:

  o **Consultative**
    ▪ *adults seek children and young people's views and perspectives to build knowledge and understanding of children and young people's lives and experiences. It is an adult-initiated and led process that values children and young people's perspectives and offers them opportunities for influence.*

  o **Collaboration**
    ▪ *adults work in varying degrees of partnership with children and young people as collaborators. Opportunities are created for children and young people to take active roles influencing the design and processes of projects and sharing decision-making. Projects remain adult initiated although their early development may be informed by children and young people.*

  o **Child-led**
    ▪ *Opportunities and resources enable children to initiate their own projects groups and activities. Processes are owned and led by children and young people, although adults may be invited to facilitate and support them with aspects of their work.*

(Adapted from Lansdown and O'Kane, 2015)

The translation of these 'levels' into the research process is presented diagramatically below.

| Children as research subjects | Children **consulted** on aspects of research process | Children **collaborate and work in partnership** with researchers | Children **supported to lead and have ownership of** research activity |

Increasing levels of involvement and participation
(adapted from Shaw, Brady and Davey, 2011)

- As noted above it is possible for children and young people's participation to take place at several of these levels simultaneously within a single research project or activity.

- The International Centre understands that different 'levels' of participation are possible or appropriate at different times, depending on capacity, interests, and circumstances of individuals, the funders requirements and resources available to the project.

- The International Centre recognises that it is important <u>not</u> to view different levels of participation as a 'hierarchy'. However we equally recognise that collaborative and facilitation of child led research initiatives are undertaken more infrequently (within the International Centre and beyond) due to intensive resource requirements and more challenging power sharing arrangements. We therefore recognise the need to renew a commitment to encouraging and considering these forms of participation wherever possible.

The International Centre's commitment to children and young people's participation is part of a wider commitment to recognise, value and work in partnership with all relevant research stakeholders, including but not limited to: practitioners, policy makers, parents and carers, campaigners and children and young people.

Guiding principles

This strategy is based on to the following **guiding principles**

- we endeavour to uphold the best interests of the child at all times[1.]

- we recognise and respond to children as active members of society in accordance with their evolving capacity

- we aim to adhere to the highest ethical standards in research, in line with page 8 of this paper

- we promote non-discrimination, and equality and inclusive practice

- we work within a rights based framework as per the UNCRC and European Convention on Human Rights.

- we respect the experiential knowledge and expertise of children and young people

- we promote reflective practice and remain open to learning and development

Children and young people's involvement is recognised and valued for many reasons including (but not limited to) recognition that:

- Children and young people, and particularly those with experience of services or issues relevant to the International Centre's research agenda, have **critical experiential expertise and perspectives**, which support the generation of new knowledge on child sexual exploitation, violence and trafficking and responses to these issues.

- Children and young people's participation within research (in multiple roles and at various levels, in line with their evolving capacity) is **a vital component of fulfilling the centre's aims of developing relevant and innovative applied research** which works to improve policy and practice.

- Children and young people's involvement is a fundamental requirement of ethical and protective practice that **seeks to redress the power imbalances** inherent within the relationships of child versus adult; service user versus

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[1] Where differing views about what constitutes a child's 'best interests' exist, and a child is under 16 (or is assessed to have additional learning needs or vulnerabilities) International Centre staff must defer judgement to those with on-going parental responsibility for the child.

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service provider and research participant versus researcher/research institute[2].

- Children and young people's involvement **furthers the International Centre's research accountability** to research participants, and **improves scrutiny** of ethical practice. It can make us better researchers; make our work more credible; and furthers the goal of better protecting children and young people from harm.

- Ultimately children and young people's participation in the centre is about **shifting the balance of power** within research. It inevitably requires professionals and partners to consider and commit to sharing or relinquishing aspects of their decision-making powers.

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[2] 3. This approach aspires to move away from a sole reliance on conventional research which has tended to frame particular groups, including children and young people, as passive research participants - objects of investigation - rather than active participants within the process. Such approaches have tended to reinforce power imbalances between researchers and those they research.

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Valuing participation

Children and young people's participation in research, dissemination and related activities is valued both as a means of improving the quality of research and of realising children's rights

The potential **value and benefit of these contributions to the International Centre** are recognised as:

- improving the quality of data and its interpretation
- improving the accessibility of research information and tools
- improving recruitment and engagement of research participants and partners
- furthering the relevance and credibility of research;
- enhancing the communication of research findings and therefore the influence and impact of our research;
- more effectively holding those in power to account; and
- stimulating on-going reflection about the relationship between applied research, research participants and practice.

The potential **value and benefits of these opportunities for participants** are recognised as:

- supporting the realisation of children and young peoples' right to be involved in decisions which affect their lives and those of their communities, and communicating the importance of their opinions
- supporting children and young people to enhance both their own and other children and young people's life chances and opportunities through
  - furthering knowledge, understanding and skills;
  - providing opportunities for their broader personal development
- supporting child centred transitions for those affected by sexual violence into self-determined adulthood: providing access to new networks and opportunities (including training, employment, voluntary work and funding);
- fostering positive identities – beyond that of service user or 'victim of sexual violence';
- providing opportunities for children and young people to affect change and contribute to the development of services or support which have affected them directly, and
- developing networks through supportive groups and activities with other children and young people and adults.

Ethical Framework

The International Centre's work is subject to on-going ethical scrutiny through the Institute and University ethics committees, as well as external ethical review processes.

All staff within the centre should have enhanced DBS checks and receive regular child protection training.

Meaningfully and ethically involving children and young people in research has resource and cost implications which should be fully considered and costed when prospective project budgets are developed. Our experience has shown us that ethically involving children and young people in research, is enabled through the development of valued partnerships with voluntary and statutory sector practitioners and the services they work for. These services provide a critical role in supporting children and young people to engage in these activities. The centre recognises this contribution and the related costs to these organisations. It seeks, where-ever possible[3] to ensure that it is costed in budgets, funded and fully acknowledged.

Activities relating to children and young people's participation are also subject to the following ethical framework/ principles. This framework will be shared with partners and should form the basis for project planning alongside the checklist for developing participatory practice (Annex A). It should be read in conjunction with the Institute/International Centre's broader research ethics framework.

Voluntary participation

a) **Voluntary involvement:** All children and young people's participation in the work of the centre is on a voluntary basis and can be ceased at any time. Staff and partners commit to uphold this, avoiding the application of any coercive or persuasive strategies, no matter how subtle or well meaning. Consideration should be given to the ease with which young people can dissent or opt out of involvement and steps taken to ensure it is easy and comfortable to do so.

b) **Fully informed consent:** All children and young people who consider participating in the work of the centre, either directly or through partners, will be supported to make informed choices about their engagement through the provision of accessible information and opportunities to ask questions and reflect on the impact of involvement in the short and long term. The

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[3] Explaining that there may be times when University's contribution not funded and therefore partnerships are entered into which require voluntary contributions from all parties due to shared commitments to enable young people's contributions within decision-making fora.

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relationship of children and young people's involvement to the wider research and policy context should be made explicit as part of this information sharing. Consent is recognised as an ongoing process rather than a one-off event and requires ongoing prompts for participants to reflect at key identified points within a project (e.g. before and after an interview, prior to public presentations).

c) **Transparency and managing expectations:** The centre commits to making issues of ownership, responsibility and decision-making power clear and explicit to participants. This means for example that the degree (and limits) of children and young people's involvement , influence and ownership over decisions and outputs in research will be considered and made explicit to participants and partners at the outset of a project or initiative where possible.

d) **Parent/carer consent:** Children and young people's participation can never take place without their explicit consent. However in cases where children are under sixteen years, additional parent or carer consent to participate *may* need to be sought. This may also apply to older children in cases where they have additional needs and their project workers advise that this is required. Exceptions are made in cases in which asking parental consent is judged to place a young person at additional risk, and a young person is assessed to be Gillick competent. This issue would be judged on a case by case basis in discussion with agencies through whom young people are accessed.

Accessible and inclusive practice

e) **Inclusive practice:** The centre recognises that children and young people's involvement will always fall short of fully inclusive, representative practice. However where possible, within the bounds of available resources, the centre will actively work to remove barriers to participation on the basis of: language, ethnicity, disability, religious belief, stigma, gender, disability, institutional experiences (including children who are looked after or working with a youth offending team), sexuality,   exclusion from school, or communication capacities. In addition and where possible it will seek to provide a range of approaches that support participation of children and young people with different capacities, skills and preferences, recognising that this may require significant support from specialist workers and agencies.   The possible resource implications for promoting inclusive practice should be costed and considered in project planning.

f) **Age, evolving capacity and diversity:** Following on from the points raised above, children and young people should not be viewed as a homogenous group and activities and information should be adapted for the different

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circumstances and capacities of potential participants. The International Centre recognises the importance of not making assumptions about children and young people's preferences for involvement in research, or the most appropriate way to communicate with them. Plans for involving children and young people in research should not solely be based upon generalised or simplified categories such as age, gender or asylum status. Instead diversity within and between groups is recognised and opportunities should be taken to consult with participants directly and with parents, carers or other trusted supporters to ascertain preferences about the most appropriate means of engaging and communicating with young people. It is recognised that children and young people will require different forms and levels of support to participate.

Safe practice and managing risk

g) **Working with and through project partners:** As a general rule[4], initial engagement of all children and young people in research activities within the International Centre will be facilitated with and through project partners. This stems from an acknowledgement of the limits to the role of International Centre staff in supporting children and young people directly. Potential project partners should as a minimum have the following:

- resources and expertise to comprehensively risk assess potential participants
- commitment and resources to provide support to participants before, throughout and following engagement in the International Centre's work. *This includes helping children and young people to make informed choices about engagement in the project and facilitating their attendance. It also includes providing an experienced named supporter for all participants, who will actively offer them an opportunity to reflect on the process and provide any necessary support, advocacy and/or onward referral.*
- child protection policies and processes for managing disclosure

h) **Managing confidentiality within the bounds of child protection legislation:** Children and young people who participate in activities of the International centre will be given a commitment by staff that unless they disclose something which raises significant concerns for them or another individual, their contributions will not be disclosed to other individuals, prior to

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[4] In some scenarios children and young people will wish to continue engaging in International Centre participation activities after their involvement with project partners ends. Where children and young people are over 16 years, the potential to support this will be risk assessed and managed on a case by case basis. This process will involve working with a young person to map existing or potential sources of support, to anticipate any risks, and develop terms for involvement and a plan for responding in a scenario where additional support is needed.

anonymisation, unless consent is explicitly given. Where information is shared which raises significant concerns about an individual's wellbeing, local child protection procedures will be followed with a commitment to keeping the individual fully informed wherever safe and possible. Staff within the International Centre are fully trained to deal with such disclosures.

i) **Responding to child protection issues:** Child protection issues will be responded to in line with training and the appropriate local procedures. In most cases this means that issues are fed through the child protection framework of supporting or referring agencies. Following incidents in which a child protection concern or issue is formally raised, the International Centre will advocate for the child or young person to be kept informed and involved as far as possible in decision-making processes which follow.

j) **Managing personal information:** Managing confidentiality also means that personal information about participants (or potential participants) is only requested by International Centre staff, on a need to know basis. Partners or referring agencies are specifically instructed not to share participant's personal information with International Centre staff without the explicit consent of potential participants.

k) **Managing confidentiality in group settings and activities:** In work which takes place in group settings, participants will be supported (through reflective activities – See Annex D) to consider the limits to which professionals can guarantee confidentiality and the need for this to inform participant's choices of what information to share within this setting.

l) **Managing group dynamics** – work which takes place in a group setting requires careful planning, risk assessment and support, recognising the potential for additional risks to participants posed by both other participants and emerging group dynamics. A full risk assessment should always precede the development of group work and the group work itself include: a minimum of two co-facilitators; the collaborative development of a group agreement; clear agreement on how to ensure the group agreement is managed in practice (i.e. whether and what sanctions would be used); activities to support group interaction (ice-breakers; energizers etc) and activities which promote safe and comfortable endings as a minimum.

Support for meaningful participation

m) **Responding to and providing for children and young people's support needs:** Scenarios exist where either children and young people's participation in the research catalyses additional support needs; or additional support is

required to enable individual children and young people to participate in the research. In both such scenarios the relevant partner agencies, through whom children and young people are engaged in research activities, should be funded to provide any additional support which emerges due to their involvement in research. Where possible, project planning should be undertaken collaboratively with partner agencies to anticipate such needs. Project plans and costings should ensure that the resources and flexibility to respond to emerging support needs are available.

n) **Preparing and supporting all stakeholders for meaningful partnership**: We recognise that bringing different groups (e.g. statutory service providers, parents and carers, researchers and service users) together to work in partnership for the first time may present challenges. Prior to such activities, preparatory work should be undertaken with each different stakeholder group to manage expectations, consider issues of ethics, group dynamics and accessibility of information and language and develop strategies to effectively manage these.

o) **Training and support to children and young people**: In addition we recognise that children and young people will also have differing needs for support to prepare them for meaningful participation. Support needs will differ depending on the activities involved but a commitment will be made preparing young people fully: managing their expectations, clarifying roles, identifying the skills they require and supporting them to develop these, and putting in place any required support. A consideration will be given to how to support young people to help/support each other participate

p) **Reciprocity:** Consideration should be given to appropriate reciprocity for children and young people who offer their time and expertise to support research. In many cases it may be appropriate for children and young people's participation to be on a solely voluntary basis, and reciprocity in such cases will represent a symbol of acknowledgement and thanks rather than payment for time. However in other circumstances – particularly where young people are being asked to work alongside professionals who will be being paid in a comparative role (e.g. on steering groups; as part of recruitment panels) consideration should be given to the appropriate level and form of reciprocity to offer parity with professional counterparts.

q) **Transparent partnership**: Work with children and young people is recognised as a partnership in which all stakeholders have different but equally valued roles. Differences in roles will depend on the needs of the task and the capacity of participants. As far as possible, clarity about the particular role, remit and responsibilities of each stakeholder group should be clarified at

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the outset of any participatory initiative. On-going opportunities to review and reflect upon roles and responsibilities should be built in to the timeline of any project.

r) **Flexible and responsive** the International Centre recognises that projects never go quite as planned. Therefore it is important that those leading projects maintain a commitment to being responsive to the changing dynamics and circumstances of a project or initiative. Flexibility should also be available within project plans to respond to[5] additional needs or ideas which emerge from participants themselves particularly where these are prioritised by participants above the stated project aims.

Representation and identity

s) **Anonymisation of contributions:** In most circumstances, children and young people's individual contributions within participatory activities will be anonymised in the fora in which they are publically shared (e.g. within publications, presentations and multi-media outputs). Exceptions to this include situations in which children and young people choose to present aspects of their contributions publically (through media, conference presentations or the co-delivery of training). In such circumstances International Centre staff commit to support participants to undertake careful consideration of the implications of public testimony and disclosure for themselves and others in both the short and long term.

t) **Supporting positive identity:** The centre recognises the importance of supporting children and young people to maintain control and choice in how they and their contributions are represented. This includes ensuring opportunities for children and young people to discuss and reflect on whether they wish their public identity to include aspects of their service user experience and their preferred use of language around this.

Learning, feedback and accountability

u) **A commitment to reflective practice** by all professionals responsible for managing children and young people's participation. This should be built in to existing supervision but formal opportunities for team reflection, debriefing and recording learning should be built into the plans for any project.

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[5] In this context 'respond to' may simply mean signposting or sharing information with other professionals to respond more fully, or it may be adapting project objectives or activities to incorporate new ideas initiated by participants.

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v) **Clear and honest communication about the role and potential impact of children and young people's participation**: When explaining the role of children and young people's participation or specific projects to stakeholders and participants, researchers from International Centre should be careful to manage expectations appropriately, ensuring they don't 'oversell' the potential impact that young people's involvement will have.

w) **Feedback from participants** should be built into all projects. A range of opportunities should be developed to all participants to challenge and provide feedback on their experience of the process, both during and following completion of their involvement. Records of this feedback should be used to adapt projects, influence future work and encourage critical reflection.

x) **Feedback to participants:** All participants (children, young people, parents/ carers and supporting project staff) are entitled to full feedback on the outcomes of their participation in research both immediately following and where possible in the medium to long term. Structures should be put in place to enable this during project planning and on-going review.

y) **Accessible information:** Information produced by the International Centre which is relevant to children and young people either as participants, or as part of the audience for research and evaluation, will be provided in accessible age appropriate language and formats.

ANNEX A: CHECKLIST FOR DEVELOPING PARTICIPATORY PROJECTS

Thinking about involving children and young people in your research? Have you thought about the following?	Considered and planning taken place?	Follow up actions?
Rationale *Why are you involving children and young people?* • What is their specific role(s) on the project or initiative? • What do you hope to achieve through this? • What will be the benefits to the project? • What will be the benefits to children and young people?		
Stakeholder commitment *What is the level of commitment to children and young people's participation from different stakeholders?* • To what extent do stakeholders share the same values and understanding of children and young people's participation? • Are there opportunities to develop a shared understanding and commitment? • How will you prepare different stakeholders for their direct engagement with children and young people?		

Cost Implications
 	
Have you fully costed the children and young people's involvement?
 	
• What are the full costs?
    ◦ For the centre?
    ◦ For children and young people?
    ◦ For agencies supporting them?
• Do funders fully recognise these costs and the legitimacy of them?		

Sharing power *What type of decisions are you proposing involving young people in?* • Are there opportunities for children and young people to feed into the planning and agenda setting of the activity/ initiative? • What are the boundaries of responsibility or decision-making power you are able or willing to share with children and young people? • If children and young people are excluded from some stages of the process, can you explain and justify this?		
Engagement *How will you identify and engage potential young participants?* • Have you provided clear inclusion/exclusion criteria for potential participants? • How will you assess risks to potential participants of involvement?		

• What if any barriers to inclusion do you forsee for potential participants? Which of these can you address with current resources? • What if any barriers may be presented by gatekeepers? And how can you minimise these? • How will you explain project, activity or role to potential participants and how do you enable opportunities for them to raise questions?		
Benefits to young people *What are the potential benefits for children and young people?* • How will you ensure the experience is enjoyable? Fun? A positive learning opportunity? • How can you design the direct involvement to keep young people actively engaged? • Are there opportunities for accreditation of children and young people's contributions?		
Accessibility *How will you ensure that activities or tasks are understood and accessible?* • Are your methods, models, and materials appropriate to the group? • Is your use of language jargon free and accessible? • Do you have relevant information about participants abilities, literacy, cultural backgrounds, and relevant personal needs?		

• Are there a range of ways in which children and young people can contribute? • Is there enough time built in for participants to make a meaningful contribution? • How will you prepare participants for taking up new roles or responsibilities for the first time?		
Safety and group dynamics *What are the risks to participants and how will you manage them?* • How can you design activities to create safe boundaries? • Will you use group agreement exercises? (if not why not?) • What are the procedures for dealing with disclosures; group conflict; distress? • What if any risks does each activity pose to participants? How can you mitigate this? • What if any risk do participants pose to each other? How will you manage this? • What follow up support do participants have access to?		
Payment and reciprocity: *How will you demonstrate recognition for the value of children and young people's time?* • Have you identified the potential for participants to incur expenses when participating in the project? How will these be funded and repayment organised?		

• Is it appropriate to pay participants (particularly if you are asking young people to take on a role in which other people are being paid?). • Is it appropriate to make a donation to a project supporting young people or a provide a thank you meal? • Is it appropriate to offer vouchers – are these understood as payment for time or acknowledgement (thank you) for their contribution? • Will paying individuals create any tensions with other children and young people?		
Reflection, learning and evaluation *How will you capture learning and reflect and review the process?* • What steps can you build in to capture learning? • What steps can you build in to allow all participants/ stakeholders to reflect and review the process? When should this happen? • What are the opportunities for participants to give feedback and for you to respond?		
Feedback and recognition *How will you feedback to participants?* • If this takes place beyond the project timeline how will you resource this? What are the timescale commitments associated with feedback – are they realistic and have they been communicated to participants?		

- How will you acknowledge young people's contributions? - Does acknowledgement compromise anonymity? - If anonymity is provided, will this prevent wider recognition of young people's contributions – are there other options are there to recognise this?		

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