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**Notes towards an evaluation of
The Office of Children's Rights
Commissioner for London
(the Office): Phase 1. 2000-2001**

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Terms

Advisory Board - the people aged 10-18 years, serving as the Office's advisers

Article 12 - the national organisation run for and by people aged 8-17, to promote the UNCRC and especially its article 12: the right of the child to express views freely on any matters affecting the child

Children – we have sometimes written 'children' rather than 'children and young people' for brevity, because the report is about the UNCRC, and to emphasise that young children are also referred to, though 'children' also includes many people who are young adults rather than children

CRAE - The Children's Rights Alliance for England, the main agency that set up the Office

GLA - Greater London Assembly

NGO - non-governmental organisation (in this report mainly children's charities)

The Office - Office of Children's Rights Commissioner for London

UNCRC - United Nation Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989

1 Introduction

This report records phase I of an evaluation of the Office of Children's Rights Commissioner for London (the Office) over the first 18 months of its 3 year life. This can be only a partial evaluation, not a definitive or conclusive one. We observed processes, progress and interim outcomes, and collected young people's and adults' views about the Office. Some of the findings could be used as baseline data in a second phase evaluation, for later comparison. The Office is due to close in April 2003.

Section 1 explains how the Office was set up, and its staffing and objectives. We report the SSRU evaluation plans and activities, besides the social context of the Office's work, and background debates about children's right and abilities to participate as citizens.

Section 2 reviews in more detail the Office's activities in connection with its eight original aims recorded in 1998 in its funding applications.

Section 3 records the views of children and adults about children's rights in London and the work of the Office. The groups range from people working in the Office, to young people in schools and other settings, to policy makers.

Section 4 summarises how our findings so far answer the evaluation questions set out in 2000 in our original protocol. Appendix 1 outlines the case for a national Children's Rights Commissioner. Appendix 2 gives further details about the evaluation, and Appendix 3 reviews the problems of doing evaluations in general, and of doing evaluations for and with children in particular.

1.11 The Office of Children's Rights Commissioner for London

The Office was established for three years, from March 2000, as a demonstration project to promote children's rights and to make the case for a Commissioner for Children's Rights. Initiated by the Children's Rights Alliance for England, which includes Article 12, the Office is funded and supported by the National Lottery, NSPCC, The Children's Society, the Bridge House Estate Trust and the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation.

Before the Office opened, a young Advisory Board was appointed and has been fully involved in setting policies, appointing the staff and planning and running events.

1.12 The Office Staff

Moirá Rayner Director, March 2000 - August 2001

Caroline Boswell Director, August 2001 -

Molly Edwards Administrator, March 2000 - May 2001

Bess Herbert Programme Director, March 2000 -

Karen Newell Programme Director, March 2000 - September 2000

Nancy Kelley Programme Director, September 2000 -

Kate O'Mahony Administrative assistant March 2001 -

Marian Fernandez Office Manager May 2001 -

Suzanne Hood Temporary part-time Research Officer, November 2000-

1.13 The Office Objectives

The Office staff made regular business plans showing their main objectives, associated tasks, progress towards achievement, and measurable indicators of success for each objective. In October 2000, for example, the Office plan listed the following objectives, adapted from the grant application protocol.

1. Demonstrate the unique value of a children's rights commission
2. Promote the implementation of the UNCRC
3. Promote and demonstrate children's participation in government
4. Carry out research as a basis for legal and administrative change (State of London's Children Report; news clippings service; link to research agencies; map current procedures; monitor legislation, inquiries and reports; identify areas where research and change are needed)
5. Run an efficient and productive Office that is also happy, creative, fair and based on mutual respect and inclusion.

1.21 The Evaluation

Staff at SSRU were asked by Peter Newell to evaluate the Office, and broadly to study its processes, successes and failures, and the problems and opportunities it met with. Originally we applied for three-years' funding. We aimed to work with children and young people including socially excluded groups, and organisations working for and with children in London, and to examine the following issues:

- * knowledge about the UNCRC and about the Office;
- * the theoretical and practical commitment to implementing the UNCRC and the Office's aims;
- * opportunities and barriers to implementation;
- * activity towards implementation.

In the event, the evaluation was funded initially for only for 12 months (September 2000-August 2001) with a half time Research Officer. A second part-time Research Officer was employed (using outstanding funds and extra funding from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation) April-January 2002. We stopped collecting data in the autumn of 2001, half way through the Office's life.

1.22 The Stage 1 Evaluation Activities

During 17 months, we:

- * conducted discussions and other fieldwork with groups of young people: refugees and asylum seekers in a primary school; young people in a secondary school; care-leavers; young people at a youth club; and Traveller children;
- * had some contacts with the Office's Advisory Board of young people;
- * observed the Office's public events;
- * kept a diary of the Office's work through five sessions that included individual interviews with the Staff;

- * interviewed ten Children's Rights Officers in London;
- * interviewed policy makers in NGOs that work for children and at the GLA;
- * reviewed the social and political contexts of the Office's work.
- * held four review and planning meetings with our own Advisory Group.

1.23 Notes on the Evaluation

In this process evaluation, we studied the processes through which the Office worked to promote children's rights. Using an 'enlightenment model' of evaluation we shared information and options with the Office, and discussed their progress with them. We aimed to be neither clearly detached from, nor closely involved with, the Office although we share their commitment to the UNCRC as the basis for their work.

A process evaluation can document the progress of a demonstration project, such as the Office. It can see how the Office might be replicated, for instance in other cities, and identify factors that impede or help the project's progress, and that could be relevant to any future similar project (Patton 1990: 95-6). This report covers phase 1 only, before many final stages and effects of the Office's work can be known.

1.31 Involving children

We thought that it was crucial to involve children in our work, and aimed to do so in four main ways.

1. To consult them in order to understand their *knowledge* of rights, their experiential knowledge of life in London, their wishes for their lives now and in the future.

Later sections report what we learnt from them.

2. To use their knowledge, experience and views to form bases for constructing *measures* to evaluate policies and services which impact on young people's lives.

This first phase mainly concerns processes towards goals rather than measuring achieved goals and outcomes.

3. To use their responses to formulate the *questions* to ask during the evaluation.

Sessions with young people helped us to choose the questions to address, within our limited resources of time and staffing.

4. To work with *young people as researchers* during the evaluation.

We only partly achieved aim 4. Children and young people worked with us to some extent in collecting data, offering their own evaluations of some of the Office activities and, mainly, of their own status and respect for their own rights. We failed to convene a young advisory committee for our evaluation, although we had some young members on the advisory group.

During autumn 2000, we approached several young people and groups to invite them to advise generally on our evaluation and work with us on designing the next stage and applying for funds. Some expressed interest in working with us, but then said they were too busy. Some were very involved in specific concerns, such as disability rights, or being 'care-leavers'. They were more concerned with their special interests than with

generic children's rights. We therefore planned future projects and fundraising with them, on investigating and reporting about the rights they were particularly interested in (see 3.10 and 3.11 later).

Perhaps mistakenly, we also concluded from the young people's responses that, for them, evaluating a project is less direct, practical, creative and satisfying than directing a project, as the Office's young advisers were involved in doing. The Office staff and young advisers devised effective ways of for working together, and this included making evaluations of their own work as part of a broad and very practical programme of working to change GLA policies and the status and state of London's children.

The Office's success in their active young Advisers Board may partly be attributed to their having fulltime staff, and a space, the Office, with a welcoming reception area and ample wall display areas for young people to make their own tangible and social centre of activity. We had not budgeted for enough time to spend on establishing proper contacts with young people, or to work at the pace needed to consult them at every step. The Office staff were skilled at doing this.

1.41 The social context

Policy The evaluation had to take account of the Office's changing socio-political context of many concurrent activities and initiatives. These could create supports or obstacles that affect the Office's work and success, and to discount these could result in over- or under-estimating the Office's achievements.

The years since the UNCRC was published in 1989, and ratified by the UK in 1991 have seen some important moves towards recognition of and respect for children's rights in the UK. These include: a well-funded statutory Welsh Commissioner for Children and progress towards Commissioners in Scotland and Northern Ireland; the government's Children and Young People's Unit; increasing guidance in government publications that children as well as other interest groups be invited to participate in planning policies. During the last 12 years, NGOs have continued to promote children's rights in the UK, and children's rights are slowly moving up the national agenda, in response to many factors and partly irrespective of the Office's work, so that it is not possible to attribute impacts definitely to the Office. However changes can tentatively be attributed to the Office, for example: where there is direct acknowledgement of the Office's work; where the Office is uniquely active or has clearly negotiated changes albeit along with other organisations; and where its work has been copied by other organisations.

Besides facilitating factors, there are also barriers. Some agencies have been slow to respect children's rights, particularly central government (UK 1994, 2000; CRDU 1994; UN 1995; Freeman 2000), although as noted sudden changes occurred towards the end of 2001. Centrally-led change can be rapid, such as when, following public outrage, the government set up the generously funded Bristol Inquiry about children's heart surgery, and rapidly responded to its recommendations by appointing a 'Tsar' for Child Health, to set agreed, enforceable standards. There has not been a comparable national drive to

promote children's rights.

1.42 *Mistaken prejudices about children's rights and competencies* Highly influential social pressures can restrict progress on promoting children's rights and they include the following kinds of misapprehensions.

- * To respect children's rights inevitably means disrespecting parents' rights and responsibilities.
- * Protection must come well before, and often conflicts with, all children's other rights and wishes.
- * Extensive and imposed structural vulnerability is the same as, and proves, children's inherent or biological vulnerability. For instance, it is often mistakenly assumed that children must not wander the streets freely, as they used to, because they are unable to look after themselves, rather than because adults have created dangerous traffic and fears of strangers.
- * Children are not yet rational enough to be rights holders.
- * Children are pre-social, incompetent future citizens, instead of competent citizens now.
- * Rights express selfish individualism rather than mutual respect, equality and solidarity.

These prejudices still dominate many services 'for' children. Many staff were trained, and many current policies were implemented, before the new era of children's rights; and questioning one's own beliefs, traditions and routine practices is difficult.

1.43 *Research* The above prejudices have been discredited by research in four main ways.

- 1) Historians and social scientists have analysed the false philosophical premisses on which denial of women's and children's autonomy are based (Bradley 1989; Morss 1990; Lansdown 1994; Prout and James 1997; Wyness 2000; Alderson 2000a; Lee 2001).
- 2) Psychologists have shown that research methods purporting to prove children's incompetence were misleading (Donaldson 1978; Siegal 1990; Burman 1994).
- 3) Empirical observations of young children demonstrate how competent they can be. Using more sensitive observational methods, researchers have produced evidence of young children's rational decision making and activities (Damon 1988; Dunn 1988; Alderson 1993; Piper 1999; Hendrick 1994; Christensen and James 2000; Franklin 2002).
- 4) International research has shown how diverse childhoods can be and how young children are respected as competent in some cultures and not in others (Ennew 2002; Woodhead 1997).

Much research is now conducted with children, including: the ESRC's Children 5-16 Programme; studies of children's participation in health care; research with 'looked after' children (Cloke and Davies 1995; Johnson *et al* 1998; Ghate and Daniels 1997; O'Kane 2000) This work demonstrates that young children can be knowledgeable, and can

reflect on their experiences. They often hold rights-related views, and can competently manage and understand their daily lives. The evidence helps to raise children's status and increase public acceptance of children as useful contributors and participants in their communities. Data-sets about children also provide bases for documenting progress on implementing children's rights and meeting their needs, and for making international comparisons.

2 The Office's aims and activities

This section reviews how the Office carried out the eight aims adapted in the Business Plan 2000 from its original funding application in 1998. Some aims and objectives were revised by autumn 2001, towards the end of this phase 1 evaluation. The changes will be reviewed in phase 2.

2.1 A1. *To set up and run a 3 year innovative high profile Office and co-ordinated activities.*

The Office was established with three years' funding, the maximum amount which the CRAE founders thought could be raised. Three years was also considered to be a reasonable period to achieve the main aim: to make a convincing case for a statutory Children's Rights Commission that would continue and expand work initiated by the Office.

The Office was clearly innovative in many ways described later. Regarding the 'high profile', in terms of publicity, it was hard for the Office to gain editorial media interest in children and their rights, as many others have found (Neustatter 1998). An earlier plan to attract media interest, by having famous people to act as honorary Commissioners like NGO good will ambassadors, was dropped as potentially too complicated and time-consuming for the staff to support. There were plans for academic seminar and conference coverage, and for more contacts with Westminster which were not fulfilled during 2000-2001, though work with regional government proceeded much further than expected and ideas from the Office were filtering into central government initiatives (see later). The Office has therefore achieved high profile effects, as in far-reaching influence on government activity.

The Office staff consider that their success depends on forming good networks and alliances with other agencies. Much of their work has been to that end. If they have time, the staff have extensive valuable experiences and evidences. If recorded, their experiences and achievements could benefit similar ventures.

A2. *To promote community involvement and participation of children and young people in London, at all levels, from central government to individual services:*

A3 To develop a children's and young people's perspective in all aspects of London Government - by integrating their perspectives, concerns and agendas into policy making and service development, - and by successfully engaging them in mechanisms and structures associated with local governance.

The Office has been particularly innovative, in genuinely being children's-rights-led and advised by children and young people. It is very hard in almost all organisations for paid professional staff and 'lay' voluntary members, children or adults, to sustain reasonably equal relations. Simply by working in the Office, the staff quickly gain more knowledge, than most members do, and have to make great efforts to keep the members informed, if the members are to be appropriately involved and consulted. However, one of the main achievements of the Office staff has been to ensure that the young advisers have always felt welcome, informed, respected for their own expertise and genuinely involved. Despite the rapid pace of work and heavy demands on the staff, the Office has an easy-going and relaxed atmosphere for visitors, as we found during our visits and from reports by the young people. The adviser-staff relations provide a model for all organisations that involve volunteers, whether children or adults (see later sections).

Many activities were carried out relating to aims 2 and 3. The Advisory Board trained in participation methods and then ran training days for groups of other children. For example, members of two youth groups attended a training day and then with their youth workers made videos about the lack of local amenities for young people. They presented the videos to local housing Officers and councillors and to the House of Lords All Party Committee on Children, who were impressed by the videos and perturbed about the poor amenities they showed. The Office's practical sessions encouraged children to become involved with local and regional policy making and, through becoming involved, children demonstrated that this was possible and worthwhile.

During 2001, many local borough initiatives suddenly gained new encouragement from changes in government policy. The government's Children and Young People's Unit (CYPU 2001) not only began to consult young people seriously, but also advocated this in their published reports. The CYPU's 'New Strategy' in November 2001 illustrated a new willingness to listen to young people, to respect their views and involve them seriously in policy making. For example, the Strategy's Vision for children and young people (p 6) speaks of their 'chances to contribute to their local communities - feeling heard and being valued as responsible citizens - shaping their lives and their futures'. This is set alongside determined policy plans to end child poverty (over 20 years), deprivation and social exclusion. Page 7 of the Strategy records principles and policies, including that 'children and young people should have opportunities to play an effective role in the design and delivery of policies and services'. The CYPU acknowledged adopting some of the consultation methods devised by the Office, such as the 'send a postcard to Ken' (the London Mayor) campaign, resulting in thousands of postcards arriving at the Mayor's Office noting what children do and do not like about their city and would like to change. CYPU is also inviting children to send in postcards.

The Advisory Board and Office staff designed an illustrated questionnaire on children's rights in London; 5,000 copies were sent to schools, play centres, youth clubs and other centres, 2464 children replied. The staff also held discussions with groups of children concentrating on meeting with socially excluded children (430 in all). The replies were summarised in a child-friendly magazine-style *Sort it out!* Report, which was presented to the Mayor. This helped to lift children's views beyond the individual and small group levels. Using *Sort it out!*, the Office promoted children's directly reported views at city-wide levels, and also quoted them in the *State of London's Children* Report, and in plans for the Mayor's Children's Strategy. Young people have advised GLA committees, and taken part in consultation days at the GLA on transport and economic development. The Office staff help them to be involved by writing short clear versions of the GLA policy documents that were discussed, such as a child-friendly version of the GLA's Spatial Development Strategy. They helped the London Development Agency to write their Children's Policy

Possibly the Office's most important achievement was to get the Mayor to agree to have a Mayor's Children's Strategy, fairly soon after the Office was established. The Mayor's original eight Strategies, such as for transport, designated in the 1998 GLA Act, did not mention children. The Children's Strategy is based on the UNCRC and is for all children in London in every aspect of their lives. It links with the Mayor's vision of London as a prosperous, accessible, fair, green city for all the people. The Children's Strategy is a vision and a set of concrete plans to make London a world-class child-friendly city. There will be short, medium and long term plans, all influenced by children's views and contributions. Good practices will be strengthened, and new ones added and evaluated. Main policy areas include poverty, health, education, play, transport, families and neighbourhoods. The draft Strategy sent out for consultation during 2001 showed a children's perspective on education, for example, that would emphasise inclusive policies, with creativity and innovation as keys to children's learning and happiness. An example of the tools for change, such as for safe streets, would be:

Safe streets

Policy/ aim:

The Mayor should ensure that children are actively involved in designing safer streets and neighbourhoods.

Proposals:

- work with GLA transport agencies and children on best practices
- develop plans and targets with boroughs on safe routes to school, and on close links between the centres where children learn and play and local street management.

Implement and monitor:

- the number of safe routes to school schemes developed; the effects on children's freedom to use public spaces; children's annual reports on danger areas and most improved areas.

The draft included plans that:

- * The Children's Strategy will work with all the Mayor's other city-wide strategies, with government policies and other initiatives.
- * Participation Charters could be awarded to agencies that work with children.
- * The Strategy will include clear plans for monitoring and implementation.
- * Child impact statements could be produced and piloted to report on how every regional and local policy might affect children.
- * An annual State of London's Children report, by the GLA or other agency will support evidence-based development of London children's services and initiatives.

Such political changes involve numerous agencies and individuals, so that it is seldom possible to apportion credit directly to particular influences. Yet the Office has clearly played a leading role in shaping GLA policies about children, and in modelling and publicising child-friendly methods of working with them that are being adopted at regional and national government levels.

A4. To promote the interests of children and young people, in particular those who are traditionally socially excluded or marginalised.

A5. To disseminate good models, and pilot and test new methods of working with and for children.

Besides the methods already mentioned, the Office has used lively, inclusive methods for contacting and involving a wide range of children, such as through their illustrated and very clearly worded questionnaire, and by arranging accessible meetings. They have worked closely with special interest groups such as Young and Powerful, the group run for and by disabled young people. The Office tends to involve and appeal to disadvantaged children, who are strongly interested in children's rights through the experience of having their rights denied to them. Through listening to and involving them, the Office is then able to work with them on promoting their interests and those of their peers.

One example of attracting new people was the Big Meeting, an all day event attended by 500 children in May 2001. The Young Advisers had chosen the venue, a night-club, and the activities, such as party bags of goodies to take home, the art and music activity rooms, and the loud music. During the final workshop chaired by two Advisory Board members, for over an hour two GLA members answered children's questions, which covered: 'Why have prices gone up in London?' 'How can you make London streets safer for children?' and 'Why isn't there fair pay for children?' The Deputy Mayor replied to this by explaining policies and ending, 'We're making things better with your help', to which the questioner replied 'How can we help you?' The spontaneity suggested that the children were expressing their own political views and had not been coached by adults. Most people there seemed very interested throughout the session. As a 'consciousness-raising' event, the Big Meeting conveyed a vivid sense that children's rights are on the map in London and are lively, exciting and fun. Commenting on the Big

Meeting, children said it was 'brilliant', 'fantastic', and 'I loved it, can't wait to come back.'

A6. To be a short term demonstration project to benefit young Londoners.

A7. To influence longer term community and government structures at all levels in the capital.

A8. To provide a model for cities and regions in the UK, which will also have international relevance.

Three years is an extremely tight time-scale within which to change a city. Yet already there are changes as certain groups of children and adults become more informed about children's rights, their relevance to planning and activities in London, and methods of making small or large changes. Working with other children's agencies, the Office is a demonstration project in two main ways: it proves the interest and abilities of children to work on promoting their rights and on improvements in the city; and it sets up structures and methods for involving them. These include making contacts and allies in government agencies, and developing methods of working with them alongside young people.

On making the case for a Children's Rights Commissioner, we found general agreement among children and adults whom we interviewed that the Office provided vital and sometimes unique services:

- * raising the profile of children's rights and the UNCRC
- * reporting the specific needs of London's children
- * providing networks for large and small children's agencies
- * capacity building and demonstrating how young people can be involved in policy making
- * working for a Children's Strategy in London.

Some NGOs work strongly in these areas, but only the Office concentrates entirely on them in London. Without the Office or an equivalent, such as a Children's Rights Commissioner, progress made is unlikely to be sustained or advanced. Some kind of replacement authority from 2003 is very much needed. People we interviewed debated the merits of a statutory or voluntary Commissioner. A statutory Commissioner would have more power, and a voluntary one more critical independence. The best solution could be a statutory Commissioner who would be complemented and challenged by the numerous voluntary agencies run for and sometimes by children. Like other Ombuds and government inspectors, the Commissioner would review complaints, make independent public reports, stimulate policy-making and reviews, and complement agencies such as the CYPU, which plans government policy. An important task during 2002-2003 for the Office will be to campaign for a national Commissioner with regional networks to be appointed.

A generic national Children's Rights Commissioner could immensely strengthen advocacy and protection services for children. At present these are fragmented, limited, uncoordinated and often ineffective. The very costly social and economic failures of the present system are shown, for example, in indictments by HM Chief Inspector for Prisons of the treatment of young offenders, the Bristol Inquiry into child health services, and the

series of social services inquiries after children have been murdered at home. The Commissioner would play a key part in ensuring that policies such as the London Children's Strategy were properly established and implemented, and copied elsewhere. During 2001, some Office staff became discouraged by the very slow process of trying to get the Children's Strategy agreed and adopted. If adopted, the Strategy could greatly benefit London's children, and provide a model for other cities and regions.

The Office also demonstrates that constant reference to the UNCRC helps agencies to set agreed priorities and work respectfully with children. During the evaluation we met with other agencies working with and for children who avoided or even criticised the mention of children's rights. We noted that, in contrast to the Office, their reports were sometimes disrespectful of children, and lacked the clear aims and rationale that the UNCRC provided for the Office.

2.2 One important model created by the Office is *The State of London's Children Report* (Hood 2001) which analyses the mainly national records about children down to regional level. The report shows clearly how each area of children's lives links to the other areas, and especially to poverty. A few points from the report illustrate its importance.

London is home to 1.65 million children (under 18 years), almost a quarter of the total population; over one-third (of under 16s) belong to an ethnic minority (three times higher than for the rest of the UK).

Child poverty rates in London are the highest in England, with 43% of children living in households with below half average income. Although London was named the wealthiest cities in Europe in 2001, 15 out of the 17 poorest boroughs in England are in London. Extremes of wealth and poverty make it even harder for poor families to survive when the costs of living in London are so high.

Poverty compounds other disadvantages. It affects children's health: poor children are more likely to die in infancy, and to suffer mental health problems, and death from deliberate injury or accident.

Inner London children have below national average educational achievement levels, and the highest rates of school exclusion in England. Inequalities between schools are increased in London, which has the highest number of private school places in the country.

Children's rights to leisure activities are infringed by lack of safe, clean open spaces, the high cost of many of London's attractions, and dangerous traffic-filled streets. Public transport is expensive, and hard for young and disabled children to use and thereby to gain access to London's many facilities, which are often expensive.

On the right to family life: rates of 'looked after' children are high in outer London and highest in inner London; these children are especially likely to leave school with no qualifications. Homelessness is acute among London's young people.

Notably, there are no statistics on the most needy children, those who are homeless (an estimated 25,000 young people), refugees or asylum seekers; these poorest children are

least likely to be enrolled in schools or with GPs.

There are close links between poverty and youth crime. Whilst general crime rates have decreased in London and in England, crimes between young people have increased in inner London, including robbery and drug offences.

These points on the relatively high rates of social and political disadvantage of London's children have implications for the Office's direct work, and suggest the importance of the Office:

- * continuing to monitor and publicise the state of London's children;
- * ensuring that children's own views are continuously sought, so that these inform indicators of child well-being and non-well-being;
- * tackling negative stereotyping of children as victims or villains and involving them in working to solve and reduce problems;
- * working to ensure that reductions in child poverty are planned for;
- * campaigning to prompt action by other agencies.

The State of London's Children Report furthers the Office's aims in classifying all children's rights and needs under eight clear connected headings. It thereby helps to raise awareness of London children's serious needs and the poverty of many, and provides a basis for informed policy making. It provides a baseline for assessing changes over time. It quotes young people's views and shows their relevance to policy-making and action, and breaks down national figures to show their relevance to London children and, in some cases, to accountable authorities, such as local education and social services. The Report shows the value of basing the understanding and planning of children's services on a UNCRC agenda. It is an information tool to strengthen campaigns to promote children's rights, improve planning and services with and for children, and appoint Children's Rights Commissioners. It shows how an informative shorter version can be written with and for young people of a complex report, and also provides a model for other cities, and indeed the national government to follow. The government's CYPU has expressed interest in adopting this model.

3. Views of children and adults on children's rights and the work of the Office

We obtained young people's views through direct discussion with them about the Office and its activities, and indirectly by observations at Office events, and by using the Office's participation methods with groups that we met. We also gathered young people's views and experiences about living in London, their rights and the UNCRC.

3 The young Office Advisory Board

3.1 Members The terms for the Advisory Board were agreed by the NGO-funders and Article 12, who advertised and leafleted very widely for members to apply, and also trained the members. Sixteen boys and girls, aged 8 - 15 years, were appointed. Whilst Article 12 members must be aged under 18 years (the UNCRC remit) the Office Advisers can stay on until they are 18+, to cover the Office's 3-year term.

There were more girls than boys, although boys attend the monthly meetings rather more regularly. Attendance is sometimes sporadic (see 3.4). Several members spend much time at the Office where they are clearly welcomed and involved. They also keep in touch by email. There is a wide mix of social backgrounds, ages and ethnicities, and of residence around Inner and Outer London. Some members travel in many miles. There tends to be a high proportion of disadvantaged young people. 'They are very aware about children's rights when they know what it is like to have your rights denied,' the Office Staff consider. 'And all children know what that is like. They say, "I want my voice to be heard".'

By 2001, there were 11 members, and one aim of the Big Meeting in May 2001 was to advertise for new members. The Advisory Board shared in writing recruitment advertisements and job descriptions, and reviewing the applications. All 14 people from diverse backgrounds who applied were interviewed and appointed. Several were around 10 years old. A few other people had to be rejected because they were too old. The Office also has links with 700 children and young people, including 50 who joined through the Big Meeting. These links could be evaluated later.

3.2 Activities and methods The Board played a full part in the Office planning and events, described on other pages. As an example of their working games, they brainstormed their views on aspects of good partnerships between children and adults. They wrote favoured items on a large sheet, and later chose the top ten items by putting stickers on the box drawn beside each one. (Scores are shown by the numbers in brackets.) They voted for fun (4), respect (1), not too much paper work or reading (10), be honest about what is going on (7), food (10), make sure young people set the terms (8), don't assume because I'm quiet I agree (6).

3.3 The advisers' evaluations The Board held an evaluation day with an external facilitator recorded in an illustrated report (Allen *et al* 2001). They reviewed how to improve activities and attract new members, and discussed 'what makes a meeting [anywhere] a disaster?' with some critical comments on well-known politicians. One suggestion was to 'create a jargon buster - every time you see a new abbreviation stick it in'. They reviewed their aims and purposes, and shared the good things about being on the Board. Members generally praised the way they were involved and integrated into the Office's work. They said they valued the friendliness, child-friendly methods and language used by staff, the activities, and games instead of 'endless talk'. Some said they valued the events, such as the opportunity to go on the London Millennium Eye to the launch the Office in May 2000 with the slogan, 'seeing London through the eyes of a

child’.

Some advisers liked: ‘getting into the children’s rights world’; ‘gaining new skills and confidence such as speaking at public meetings and running meetings’; ‘the high profile work’; ‘open access to the Office’; and ‘being able to express my opinions!’ ‘I am very interested in equality, rights and the fact that it is not tokenistic. It is not an everyday project and it is a learning experience.’ They had remained involved because: ‘I enjoy it and not only feel but know that the Office is working for young people and listening to me and all young people.’ ‘It’s not boring, it makes me think what I say will matter, everyone’s nice and helpful.’ ‘It’s fun.’ ‘I feel the work I do may help change London so it’s better for future generations.’

The young advisers took part in all the Office’s activities and sometimes led these, including conferences, workshops and seminars, staff and member recruitment, planning Office policies and priorities, training others, carrying out and reporting research, organising events, speaking on the mass media, and producing publicity materials and a child-friendly web site www.londonchildrenscommissioner.org.uk. They plan to record their experiences in practical handbooks for other groups of young people to use.

A primary school head teacher commented on their work: ‘A lot of important work has been done over the past 18 months - very pleased that you have recruited young people to speak for young people - real participation.’

3.4 One member, Steven Allen, wrote ‘The story of the Advisory Board’ over its first 16 months (Allen 2001), setting out clear key points and key words illustrated with examples and quoted comments. The report emphasises the child-friendly structures and processes, accessibility, making good first impressions with inclusive games, and arranging appropriate training in rights and working methods. The report also reviews ‘what hasn’t been as good?’ Of the problems noted, some and perhaps all tend to be common to all voluntary organisations, old or young, although adult groups may be less willing to admit them. These include: members’ varying commitment, their problems of lack of time and long journeys into the Office; catering for different age groups; ensuring that activities are enjoyable and not too formal or dull; and finding ways to resolve disputes and conflict.

Steven Allen then reviews the advantages to the Office of having the Advisory Board. These are: to be directly informed by young people’s own views; to be constantly in touch with them; to show that this can work well; to ensure that children’s rather than adults’ views are addressed. He warns that this can be time-consuming and hard work. The adult staff have to guard against tokenism, which is counterproductive and can very easily happen, yet they also have to be tolerant of members who do not seem to be committed enough. He thus raises the crucial question of how the staff and members can have expectations that are neither too high nor too low, and suggests that this might be the themes for another paper.

Steven Allen warns agencies to be very clear about their motives and standards,

resources and budget, methods and training plans, evaluations and flexibility, when thinking of setting up an advisory board. Will the agenda be child- or adult-led? Will children plan the structures or have to fit into adult structures? Who is really going to benefit? The notes on being accessible range from including disabled children to following child protection routines. He warns against trying to use young advisers 'to show off that your organisation involves young people...You might as well just put 20 children on a wheelbarrow and wheel them out to public events and say that you have young people involved, than go to the trouble of setting up an Advisory Board.'

3.5 Likely factors in the success of the Advisory Board

Besides points mentioned earlier, our interviews, observations and conversations with people involved at the Office suggested the following likely factors for the success in finding and keeping members of the Advisory Board.

- * Much time was spent in involving young people from the start. Article 12 advised on the design of child-friendly recruitment leaflets and methods, and groups and places through which to contact children. They shared in selecting the applicants. Once appointed, the Advisory Board shared in selecting the staff.

- * The second recruitment of young advisers was linked to the enjoyable Big Meeting (May 2001).

- * The full time staff are committed to, and enjoy, working respectfully and equally with young people. They are always available to respond to enquiries, welcome visitors and follow up requests.

- * The open plan Office has a welcoming decor, and places to have formal meetings or games, or to relax or work. Young people's work and ideas are displayed on the walls, with plain English, jokes and no jargon. The inclusive feel of the office is noted in the comment 'We like multi-coloured people. Jo and Iman aged 3.' And Tamina, Tower Hamlets, wrote, 'I didn't even know about this. Now that I do actually know, I think that children should have as much rights as anyone else. It came to me as a shock, but I think it's an absolutely brilliant thing!'

- * There are close contacts between some of the young members.

- * There is an enjoyable mixture of worthwhile, effective and valued work with fun. People can relate on several levels and get to know one another well.

- * The young advisers are fully involved, far beyond tokenism. Their views shape the work and plans of the Office. There is a fair balance of power between older and younger people at the Office.

- * Some young advisers, whose contributions to the Office are highly valued, report being dismissed and criticised by their teachers at school. At the Office, they can realise, demonstrate and develop their real abilities. In doing so, they further the Office aims to promote young people's participation in public life, and also to prove how competent young people can be.

- * The staff skilfully convert seemingly boring dense reports (such as GLA strategies) into

clear summaries which young people can discuss critically. As the advisers work out what they wish to support or to challenge, they can become really engaged in politics, first through knowing that they can understand, second by speaking through channels to change London. The Office helps to create such channels - from the 'write a post card to Ken' (London Mayor) campaign, to joining GLA advisory committees, to contacting GLA members who support and respond to them.

* As already noted, in many organisations, busy staff tend to bypass rather than consult volunteers and shared planning becomes harder and less frequent. The young volunteers and Office staff, however, value and sustain their partnership as an essential resource and working method.

* Volunteers tend to be attracted by single issues that affect or concern them personally. The Office staff and young people, however, find ways to be interested in and to promote the UNCRC that encompasses all children's rights, even though it is a fairly abstract and generic document.

3.6 Views of other children and young people

We observed some of the Office's events: the Big Meeting; a training day run by the Advisory Board; two youth groups presenting videos, inspired by the training day, at the House of Lords. We also had meetings with refugee and asylum seeker children, a secondary school class aged 16-17; two groups of young care leavers; young Travellers; and we visited a youth club.

Our aims were:

- * to draw on children's views during our evaluation and particularly to work with disadvantaged children whose voices may be less often heard;
- * to collect evidence about the state of London's children and their views about the relevance of UNCRC rights in their lives;
- * to try out the Office's participation methods, such as using suggestion trees to discuss the children's visions of a perfect or nightmare city, or making videos with them;
- * to compare the views of young people in contact with the Office with those of a few of the many children that it was not possible for a single agency, the Office, to reach;
- * to develop research proposals with young people.

3.7 Refugee and asylum seeker children

3.71 Methods/ Activities We met two groups of young refugee and asylum seeker children aged 5 -12 years at an inclusive primary school. Using methods developed by the Office, during four sessions, the children brainstormed ideas around their 'perfect' and 'nightmare' school. They played rights games, 'squillionaire' that teaches about UNCRC, the 'no say total say game' on how much say children have in aspects of their lives. We used the Office's top 18 topics in the *Sort it out!* Report to start discussions. Several children spoke about assaults by teachers in their former schools abroad, and

their great fear about violence on London streets. They role-played arriving at a new school from a different country and the difficulties facing them. They videoed and took photos of places and people they liked. We introduced a new method, asking the children to match UNCRC articles, recorded in a pack of cards, to photos they had taken, to make up a photo-album.

Lorna wrote a script for the video films, 'New to Newham', and someone who had edited videos for the youth groups linked to the Office edited these. We distributed the Office evaluation forms asking the children what they thought of the sessions. They mentioned the activities they preferred and asked for more sessions.

3.72 Findings/ Comments The Office methods and activities worked extremely well, stimulating discussions on rights and informing children about the UNCRC. Some of the children were newly arrived in England and spoke little English, but they all became keen and very involved. We concentrated on rights in school, and the children and their teacher planned to do further sessions on being citizens in London and rights within families. Despite having little previous explicit knowledge about their rights or of the UNCRC, the children could easily link rights language to issues that mattered to them, such as violence, respect, and being listened to.

Relationships were of key importance to the children. Their video and photographs emphasised relationships with friends and teachers around the school, and the importance of people being 'nice', welcoming and respectful. They enthusiastically showed us around their school, especially including their teachers and friends. They emphasised that things and events do not stand alone, but take their meaning and significance from the personal relationships. They described and photographed their own experiences, such as feeling welcomed and included by kind gestures: 'she took my hand when she showed me round the school'; 'these are my friends at the computers'. Computer tasks, and indeed learning itself, became worthwhile when shared and enjoyed with other people. Cameras were used as interactive tools when children on each side of the camera shared the event.

The central importance of relationships, which may have seemed too obvious to the children to be worth stating explicitly, they also applied to their understanding of rights. The children saw the political importance of rights, such as to protection from violence, and they also saw the personal value of rights when these are enacted or denied through relationships of care and respect. Denying respect for children, refusing to listen to them, is to deny that encounters occur between equal human beings. Repeatedly, their photographs showed the importance to them of relationships that attend to care and respect, a combination emphasised through the UNCRC. This understanding of rights could be publicised far more in order to persuade critics (see 1.42-1.43 above) of the advantages of the UNCRC.

3.8 Secondary students

3.81 *Methods/ Activities* Eight students aged 17 years had an informal discussion for an hour on young people's rights and ideas for change in London. They were confident and eager to debate critically.

3.82 *Findings* The students highlighted participation rights, such as: respect (adults disrespecting young people in shops and buses); knowing about the law and their rights; free speech; the right to a nationality; freedom of religion, thought, conscience and political beliefs; equality; information and choices. They spoke critically about the limits on rights, such as how a happy home cannot be enforced. They avidly discussed when a child's right to life begins, in later pregnancy or from birth. Again, students valued the ban on physical punishment in British schools, in contrast to their former schools abroad. Some felt that concepts of children's right differed too much between continents to support universally agreed standards.

Although familiar with rights language and the 1998 Human Rights Act, none of them had heard of the UNCRC, of the Office, or of Children's Rights Commissioners. They reviewed the Office's 'child-friendly' version of the UNCRC, and approved of the UNCRC in principle, and the concept of universal children's rights. Yet they were concerned that not all countries honour these rights, that violence and child exploitation are common, and there is no universal education. Some found the 'child-friendly-summary of the UNCRC patronising. They argued that the summary, 'Article 16. A private life. For example, you should be allowed to keep a diary that nobody else can read', is unrealistic. 'There's no point in having this, because it can't be enforced. I couldn't take my mother to court about it.' They knew that rights are quasi-legal concepts. They discussed whether being 'brought up by both your parents' meant both parents living together. They thought the summary that stated your parents 'have to put your interests ahead of their own and anyone else's' was unrealistic and unfair to parents.

3.83 *Comments* This was an open, critical and lively discussion. Rights, especially participation rights, were evidently a hot issue for these young people. Their scepticism about some of the terms in a simplified version of the UNCRC showed how complicated it is to reword the UNCRC. This could be undertaken as a major project with a group of critically informed young people.

3.9 First care leaver group

Methods We met four people aged 17 years, a boy and three girls, living in a large house, with their carer. We talked with them for about 90 minutes.

3.91 *Findings* They seemed rather anxious, restless and sad. We asked them to tell us the questions they would ask, during the interviews we planned to hold with Children's Rights Officers (CROs). They did not want to be interviewers, saying that they were too

busy trying to find work, or to keep their jobs, so that they could avoid having to try to manage on the weekly state allowance of £42. They spoke of the social exclusion of being poor. Some had been homeless. When talking about rights they emphasised wanting to be trusted and respected. They thought the leaving care service 'is very very good. They do sort you out.' They spoke of extremely unhappy times when they were younger, being moved around far too often, with too little support given to parents and foster parents to help children to remain with them. 'They should be more lenient on families, and support and help them to keep their children - not my family, but other people I've known. I was probably better not with my parents because of my needs and serious problems.' They knew about some rights, but felt that they should have been told when much younger about 'the right not to be hit'. They said younger children ought to be informed now. They felt they had little choice about where they lived, and social workers should see far more from the child's perspective. Briefly, they discussed our suggestion that a check list made by young people to help social workers and children when placements were being chosen and monitored might be useful.

The young people gave the impression that, as they grew older, they were listened to more respectfully. Maybe they were seen as more sensible and articulate, or they met with more respectful individual staff, or the services were generally improving. They felt that they had been 'work objects' to the staff: 'It's just their jobs. They forget us when they go home, but they should be dedicated to look after kids...They should listen and put themselves in our shoes, not treat you as 9-5.' They contrasted living in the present house, where no staff were on duty at night, which had freedoms and rules, with the rules they might have had at home with their parents. They could not have friends to stay in the Home. 'If you break the rules you get a warning. Then it's 28 days and you are out. They find a bed and breakfast or something for you.' They all said they would much rather be at home with their family, except one who said he had spent a year trying to get into care and no one listened to him. They felt scared about having to move out of care, but looked forward to living in a flat more independently.

3.92 Comments This brief summary barely hints at the richly textured conversation and the interactions between the young people, with their carer and with us. They raised so many questions about the boundaries of formal rights, and needs which go beyond entitlements. Like the primary school children, they constantly emphasised the importance of the quality of personal relationships as the context, medium and expression of children's rights. They gave us valuable questions to use in later interviews with CROs. We would very much like to have worked with them on a shared research project, but they seemed too preoccupied to have time, interest or energy for such work at present.

3.10 Second care leaver group

3.101 Methods We had four early evening discussions during the summer and autumn 2001, over a snack meal, in a similarly rather grand but decaying house, with six other care leavers. They were members of RAGE - the Rights Advisory Group Experts. We met in the children's rights centre they have started. The walls were decorated with positive posters about rights. They worked with obvious mutual respect with an NSPCC-funded CRO.

3.102 Findings and plans All six young women were more confident and slightly older than the first group; two were mothers and another was pregnant. They covered similar themes to group 1: poverty, unhappy experiences, loneliness, insecurity, but in a rather more up-beat way. They expressed some anger, and were determined to try to change things by promoting children's rights. The group discussed imminent changes in the law. Care leavers will include 16 - 25 year olds. They had seen a training video, which they described as boring, 10 years out of date, 'doesn't convey real experiences' and 'is not moving, not emotional enough'. They were very keen to make a new rights-based video, telling their own stories, designed to prompt changes and promote better care for looked after children.

We put them in touch with a Media College that makes youth and community videos, to make a joint grant application. To ensure that this was an informed agreement, we went through potential problems with RAGE, such as disagreements over editing and selecting film to cut hours of video filing down to a 10 minute film. RAGE assured us that they were used to sorting out arguments by being assertive.

The application, based on our notes from sessions with RAGE, makes the following points. The video will 'be a voice showing that we are not alone, but we are strong too, with a mixture of testimonies and advice for other young people and care workers'. It is intended for all kinds of workers and managers who affect young people in care, including First Key trainers, and more general audiences such as councillors and foster parents. The group hopes that the video will increase understanding of young people's experiences and views and be up-to-date on the new Care Leavers Act. It is intended to be part of new training and evaluation programmes to implement the Act and to improve workers' training, as well as changing policy, practice and attitudes, and increasing respect for young people in care and leaving care. The video will show some of their difficulties such as drugs, homelessness, efforts to live on £42 a week, and budgeting difficulties for young mothers. It is aimed to increase awareness about children's rights; children in foster care do not know enough about their right, for example, not to be hit, the RAGE members believed. 'Social services are supposed to help us but they are the problem.' The video will have an accompanying brochure produced by the group in consultation with support services.

3.103 Comments We learnt much through the differences between the two groups. RAGE gave good examples of how raising their awareness of young people's rights,

entitlements, dignity and worth seems to have a healing and hopeful effect on them. It appears to enable them to work together 'to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom' (UNCRC preamble). Interactions between the young people and the key person working with them seemed to have strong effects on each group's attitudes and plans.

3.11 The young Travellers

We chose to work with young Travellers, because they can be exceptionally socially excluded and thus illuminate limits to respect for children's rights, even their basic rights to 'clean drinking water' (UNCRC Article 24).

3.112 Setting The three Traveller sites had different status. One is an authorised site. It is near a busy road, with no nearby shops or buses. The Council does provide clean water and refuse collection, but businesses dump waste near the site, and cars are abandoned there. One site is 'tolerated' with only one water tap, some portable toilets and refuse collection. It is opposite a nursery school, and near a park. The third site is 'unauthorised', and near dangerous roads, with about 12 dwelling vehicles. Families are frequently evicted from this site and the parents there tend to be very young. No basic services are provided and here, too, businesses dump industrial waste.

3.113 Methods Several meetings were held with young Travellers who live on the sites, sometimes in the visiting play bus or on organised outings. Observation was combined with some of the Office's games about children's rights, and also with informal interviews, audio taped group interviews, and a discussion group with teenagers. Some children took photos of their site and friends, and then matched these with UNCRC articles.

3.114 Findings The young Irish Travellers raised many issues. They had not heard of the UNCRC or the Office. They were concerned about pollution of their environment, and strongly agreed with the 11 year old girl who said: 'I would like to get a note at the back of the site and all the rubbish get took off and that there wasn't the river dirty, it's very dangerous for the little kids 8 or 9 year olds. And I wish they made a park for the little kids.'

They had many ideas on how their lives could be improved. They would welcome a playground, a swing, a bouncy castle and somewhere to play football. Although the school is quite near, they insisted that they did not like school, and complained of bullying and name calling: 'I hate school, because the children hate us, and we hate it, ... and they call us gypsies and things, but we don't like that, and we call them names.' Some girls aged 14 to 19 years did say they liked school in London. The children clearly enjoyed the play-bus, and wanted more than the 2-hour session twice a week, in term time only. These buses are supposed to be for children aged up to 5 years. There is a boys' club and a girls' club (ages 11 - 14), and a young women's club (ages 14 -19).

However, there are long waiting lists, and many young people feel left out. There is nothing for children aged 5-11. Staff on the play bus keep having to stop older children from coming on to the bus.

3.115 Comments This brief summary indicates that the children's freedoms to move and play are severely restricted by polluted areas and dangerous roads. As fewer authorised sites are available, the conditions on all sites deteriorate. Younger children said they felt unwillingly forced to attend schools they dislike.

3.12 An after-school youth club

Methods/findings We visited an after-school youth club where, because of new government child care policies, the staff were trying to ban people aged over 14 who were trying to get in. The younger ones in the club looked tired and bored, and the staff said they had to 'chivy' them' to do 'proper' (educational) activities.

3.121 Comments We had hoped to work on rights and perhaps plan some research with the young people, but we felt that they there were strong disincentives. The work we hoped to do would be too like school work, whereas they wanted to have a break from that. After the compulsory day at school it seemed that some of them attended the club to receive child care while their parents were at work, rather than because they chose to attend. Yet real work about rights has to start from a basis of voluntary choice. Many youth clubs are highly valued by young people, and perhaps this happened to be an unusually uninspired evening for them, although the staff did not mention that the session was untypical, or seem concerned about the somewhat negative atmosphere. It is hard for the Office and other agencies to work on rights with young people who have little choice over how and where they spend their time, and when seem to lack energy and interest after the school day. The youth club was set up as a service in which the young attenders are seen as dependent service-users, and not contributors to society. In contrast, for example, Scandinavian researchers show how some communities value, and rely for their survival, on young people's creative initiative (Kjorholt 2002; Knutson 1997).

3.13 Interviews with adults

To set our evaluation in a practical context, we investigated the views of adults working with and for London's children, about supports and barriers to promoting children's rights and about the work of the Office. This section summarises notes and transcripts of individual interviews held with three groups. At regional and national level, there were six NGO staff, and a staff member of the GLA (Greater London Assembly). We had hoped to interview GLA members, but they were not able to find the time. At local authority level there were 10 Children's Rights Officers. We also spoke with staff at the Office.

3.14 Policy makers: six leading NGO staff and one GLA staff member

3.141 *Views on the need for a Children's Rights Commissioner.*

This section is based on interviews held at the end of 2001. The Children's Rights Alliance for England is working with over 50 voluntary organisations to agree criteria for a Children's Rights Commissioner, and the interviews reflect some of this discussion. Some of the NGO staff had helped to set up the Office, and shared its aim to campaign for a statutory Commissioner. As children's services are planned and provided mainly at national or local authority levels, the intermediate level regional councils such as the GLA have less direct influence over these services although all GLA policies affect children's wellbeing. Numerous problems, such as the way bus drivers go past bus stops where children are waiting, are political issues requiring formal resolution through processes that involve children. The adult interviewees generally thought that a generic statutory national Commissioner is greatly needed for England with a network of local Commissioners. Far more children live in London than in Wales which has a statutory Children's Commissioner, and 'you need a more complex [Commissioners'] structure to cover the diversity and scale' of London. There was general consensus amongst interviewees on the following aims.

- * Commissioners would ensure that policies are based on the UNCRC, and especially on article 12 on the child's rights to express views, to be listened to, and for 'due account to be taken of their views in all matters that affect them. Children 'find it particularly difficult to claim those rights, so they need an independent human rights institution.'

- * Commissioners would advance children's participation in policy making, to go beyond consulting them and to involve them on committees, such as by adapting and simplifying committee procedures and reports in order to include children more fully.

- * Commissioners would set standards, inspect and monitor services: 'nowhere in government is there an independent body with power to put forward children's and young people's issues' and with statutory powers. 'To have real change, you need real power.'

- * A London Commissioner would be vital to concentrate local attention and action on London children's specific needs (see 2.2 above), and to act as a statutory co-ordinating body to realise the implementation 'of at least some of the rights set out in the UN Convention' across the city.

3.142 *Achievements of the Office.*

Interviewees praised the following main aspects of the Office's work.

- * *To co-ordinate and strengthen children's rights advocacy.* The Office has 'pulled together organisations, built partnerships very effectively. That's very difficult with children's organisations, they are quite a divided sector.' The question of 'who owns children's rights' was seen as a contested issue, which the Office has to confront. 'There must have been some power struggle there', particularly in the early stages of the Office's life. Yet the Office has set 'a model of partnership and good practice, in terms of agencies coming together and working for common goals through a common channel [demonstrating] that it can work, that we don't necessarily have to give up our own

identity to work for common goals with others.' Among the many organisations concerned with children's issues, some interviewees maintained, the Office played a leading role in co-ordinating the areas of work covered by these organisations, and in developing the 'focus for London.' 'There is quite clearly an opportunity for the Office to have a unique contribution on perspectives.'

* *To influence local and national government.* There is now 'a more focussed lobby of children's rights in London and in the government, which certainly wouldn't have happened otherwise.' Examples were given of the impact on the GLA and on the government's Children's and Young People's Unit. Interviewees were pleased that the Office quite rapidly persuaded the GLA to agree in principle to set up the Children's Strategy.

* *To demonstrate the value of children's participation.* All the interviewees were impressed by the level of children's participation in running the Office and appointing the staff. 'Young people's participation shouldn't be a revolution, but it is.' It challenges 'habits', stemming from the wider culture in which children and young people have little say on any aspect of society.

* *To be a model for other agencies.* Most interviewees said that their own agency had tended to involve children through consultation and project work, but few had involved children in setting the organisation's agenda. Through working with the Office, however, most of them have seen the benefits of such participatory work. Interviewees described how their own established NGOs are following the Office in changing their strategy, planning and management structures in order to involve children more. For example, the Children Society held its first national conference for children in August 2001, which elected 'a representative body of young people to work at a national level to identify issues and get them put on the agenda for our organisation. Nothing like that has ever happened before, it was very positive...That particular model of an advisory group came directly from one of the young people involved' visiting the Office and talking with one of their Advisory Board members. 'So we'd have that link to thank really, for putting that on our agenda.'

The *Sort it out!* Report and *The State of London's Children* with its short child-friendly version were thought to be very important and widely appreciated. The Office has 'given a pilot experience for England.'

3.143 *Limitations and barriers*

The following limitations and barriers affecting the Office were discussed.

* *Time scale and resources* Interviewees generally agreed that the three years' time frame is long enough for the Office to achieve its aims effectively only if its work is taken up by a permanent statutory body. There was concern about the enormous task of changing the dominant cultural and political opposition to children's rights, and the time needed for influencing slow-shifting government bodies if 'real change' is to occur. One informant felt that compromises over selection were made when the young Advisory

Board had to be 'set up very quickly, with lack of resources to properly support it. There were reservations of the [adult] Advisory Group initially...because we felt that it would favour certain individuals to participate.' The Advisory Board was, however, generally viewed as a success.

One person commented that establishing a relationship with the press takes a long time. Initial plans for the Office could have included more resources for a continuing press and publicity strategy. Instead, it 'has been a bit *ad hoc* - done it when they needed to for a launch or event.'

A perceived problem was 'the small number of staff in the Office...considering the thousands of children in London,' and the heavy workload for the staff. This 'resulted in that some of their aspirations re promoting children's rights through the media and education, etc., getting squeezed out. Many hoped for that,' added this interviewee, in an ominous reference to the strong opposition to children's rights.

* *The Office's limited influence on many services and amenities that affect children* 'I don't think [the Office] can achieve better services themselves.' They have to rely on the GLA doing so, and that can 'creates problems'. A recurring criticism related to the Office's insufficient influence with the London Local Authorities that provide education, social and other services, because of the Office's lack of time, staffing and any statutory power. The Office 'has no power whatsoever; they can ask, hassle, but there it ends. If people don't respond, there is no formal form of sanction or come-back. That's the difference between the brainchild of the largely voluntary sector and something that is statutorily empowered.' One respondent added that there is 'no culture of rights', no accountability or 'clear structures' at the borough level, which makes it very hard for the Office to have any impact on policy and on increasing children's participation in local boroughs.

* *Contact with the GLA* While the Office had some very strong active support within the GLA, not unusually for a statutory authority, the GLA 'have ways of making things take longer, and sometimes have produced obstructions that it's quite surprising to see, and they haven't always been as helpful as they could have been.' An interviewee described the 'antipathetic and uninterested environment...in which the Office has to engage with the GLA.' Another person described the GLA as chaotic, saying that 'the rhetoric and reality don't match. With participation, you are talking about a more involved and longer-term process.'

* *Limitations of the Children's Strategy* Partly because of regional/local government structures, even the GLA lacks powers truly to implement the Mayor's Children's Strategy, currently being developed by the GLA with the Office and other NGOs. This led one interviewee to say, 'I do think putting emphasis on the Children's Strategy builds up expectations, and I'm not sure how those are going to be delivered.' Another interviewee thought that there should have been more consultation about children on all the Mayor's strategies, and a third said that consultation is not enough: at 'government level we are still talking consultation as opposed to participation.' There is a danger that 'the GLA

sees the Office as doing [children's] participation for them. Maybe they have to go through that phase, but it's not the same as [GLA members and staff directly] involving children in the GLA.'

* *Restrictive national policies* Some people thought that efforts to involve children are not helped when the government pays 'lip-service' to consultation, and may not be fully committed to implementing the information that has come out of the Office's work. The problems are further complicated by government policies, sometimes forced on to a resisting GLA. There are 'funding structures and privatisation. We are getting more and more unaccountable; if you are trying to have a strategy, you are trying to talk to key people around a strategic approach, who do you go to? Things are being contracted out, powers are being lessened, and decisions are being devolved down. It's really difficult. That's a government trend to say it doesn't matter who provides, as long as they provide what we want them to provide. And who says what we want them to provide? How do you influence those decisions?'

3.144 *Opportunities for the Office*

The creation of the Office, just before the GLA was first elected, opened many doors for the Office to put children on the agenda of the Assembly from its inception. Several interviewees commented upon the resourceful, committed and persevering staff in the Office. The Mayoral and GLA candidates were asked to include children's rights in their manifestos, and they were held to account on their campaign commitment.

The interviewees regretted that the first Director had to leave (very reluctantly and for unavoidable family reasons) and that this led to unfortunate discontinuity for the Office. However, it was suggested that the change 'could also mean a strength, in terms of a new person, fresh, with energy, etc.'

With the Office's help, it was felt that 'the corner has been turned in terms of much more meaningful consultation with young people.' There was hope that the Office would ensure that this consultation 'happens across sectors, that it doesn't drop off the agenda.' People also hoped that opportunities raised by the Children's Strategy would be exploited creatively. 'The Strategy group can be made more robust – [it] would help to have some sort of parent [body] or facilitator, such as the Office is doing now, to sustain it. It's a goal worth pursuing – [there would be a] lost opportunity if that momentum starts to dissipate, if they are only called on in an *ad hoc* way, rather than having a vitality in life with the ability to set its own agenda. Tough to achieve. Key decision needs to be made, whether to let it die, or to devote resources to ensuring development of the Strategy as a priority.'

3.145 *Work for the Office's second 18 month phase*

'You've got to build on what it's achieved' to increase children's participation in policy and decision-making processes. *The State of London's Children Report* 'needs to be used strategically to try to influence the GLA, but more particularly local authorities, in a way that will actually change services.' This would involve developing 'local level

partnerships' in the London boroughs, to 'get in early with local strategic partnerships to do some pilot work,' and political lobbying to influence the GLA. *The State of London's Children Report* should also be used to make the case to appoint Children's Rights Commissioners for London and for England, otherwise it would be 'pointless'. This campaigning was seen as the main task: to win the argument with the government and the GLA for permanent statutory Commissioners. Some effort and thought has to go into thinking up contingency plans to secure continuity. The Office could also make more effective use of the NGO networks that it has created, some interviewees considered.

3.146 Summary of policy makers' views

Most of the interviewees had worked for years to promote children's rights. They shared the Office's frustrating problems and barriers. They clearly admired the rapid progress that the Office had made in forming positive networks with children and with adult agencies, influencing GLA policy, setting new standards and methods of involving children, and creating the first comprehensive regional report, assessment and campaigning tool - *The State of London's Children Report*.

All these achievements were also regarded as valuable models that national and local agencies could adopt. *The State of London's Children*, they felt, should be used strategically, targeting the Department for Education and Skills, Local Authorities and their Social Services and Education Departments, and similar bodies.

The Office was seen as a catalyst: within its short life to prompt more powerful and lasting agencies to change radically, and to demonstrate how they might do so, rather than to affect children's lives directly. However, the Office was also acknowledged to have contacted and influenced many children and adults across London, besides inspiring some NGOs to change their own practices through setting such innovative and practical examples.

Through uniquely filling gaps and achieving new tasks, the Office was thought to make a convincing case for the need for statutory Children's Rights Commissioners to continue and expand the vital work that the Office had begun.

One interviewee summarised that, overall, NGOs were highly positive about the Office's work and achievements. The Office 'should be extremely proud of themselves. It's been a really good contribution - what they've done. - It's not a contribution, they've led the field.'

3.15 Children's Rights Officers CROs

We interviewed all 10 London CROs, and also contacted all 33 London boroughs to request information about their children's rights provision. The interviews followed themes raised by the young care leavers including power, respect and how children can influence services (Clarke-Jones 2002).

3.151 CROs' views on the Office

CROs enthusiastically supported the Office's goal to

establish an independent Children's Rights Commissioner with 'muscle' and influence at Government level, to see the 'overall picture' on children's issues, and move towards 'changing our society's thinking around children being objects or things that we own'. Nine CROs had heard of the Office and its work, five had some contact with the Office staff, two had been involved in the *Sort it out!!* survey. They were generally positive about the Office's work. They especially supported establishing the Children's Strategy, along with 'a genuine will to involve young people in decision-making' particularly through the young Advisory Board. Several CROs said they wanted to find out more about the Office, and one spoke of its useful networks.

Yet they were unsure about 'implementation and effectiveness' and the Office's power to effect changes at policy level resulting in concrete changes: 'it's not enough for people just to talk'. Some would like the Office to provide or fund services, besides publicising issues. One CRO felt the Office's brief is too wide and 'couldn't help us' with individual children's rights services. Another said, 'I think it's a great idea, but I'm not convinced about it all yet'.

They saw the main future task for the Office as raising the profile and awareness of children's rights. They hoped 'that would make it easier to advocate for children in need,' to improve standards of children's services across London, and prevent cuts in budgets. One CRO thought the Office should campaign to update the 1989 Children Act. Several talked about discriminations against young asylum seekers - 'we need a media and policy campaign to say it's appalling the way they're being treated', with delays over applications for asylum, and many other problems adversely affecting severely disadvantaged children. They thought the Office should create networks across the boroughs to create a London-wide strategy, and involve London councillors and MPs so that they encourage children to approach them.

3.152 Comments When talking about their own work, the CROs showed that they shared many of the problems faced by the Office. They understood the tensions between gaining powerful allies but not alienating them by being too progressive on children's rights and advocacy. CROs can feel quite isolated. They urgently needed stronger regional and national networks to inform, develop and support their work of advocating children's rights and participation.

3.16 Views of the Office staff

We held five 'diary' sessions with the staff. They discussed the activities recorded in other sections of this report, describing their pleasure in achievements and frustration about problems. We aimed to examine the background and informal accounts behind the Office's formal records (Patton, 1990). Here are a few of their main points.

Setting examples and models of rights advocacy The staff described how they were 'making pathways, leaving footprints behind of our tools and experiences, so that it will be easier for others to follow along after we're gone.' They found that children were highly

interested in their rights, because 'they are so oppressed and they know it. We point the way forward for thinking. Moving in the right direction to achieve cultural change.'

Developing child-friendly methods The staff helped the GLA to consult young people on the Transport and Economic Development Strategies, partly by rewriting GLA documents. They begin with the summaries, explain the background and key questions, and 'take out lots of padding. Many adults in the GLA use the [Office's] children's version and at the Department of Health they call it 'the summary'. At the meeting, 'the GLA really did demonstrate some commitment...They sent along their key strategists and it was taken very seriously [and] showed that children and young people can have input into these quite dry subjects.' 'We hope that will be the springboard and model for the GLA doing their own work/consultation with children.'

Using the UNCRC as a base The UNCRC 'is a practical and symbolic basis that covers so many rights, a very important tool.' 'It's a helpful anchor, that keeps us to the real agenda.' 'With the Children's Strategy, we're joining up services, we have to keep thinking how far to compromise with language or to keep the firm rights language. People feel more comfortable with rights in service provision, it is harder to get them to think about children as holders of political rights. We're constantly having to drag attention back to that.' 'Rights' and 'Commissioner' are the two words we have to keep stressing.' We need to have a lot of discussion next year about what the Commissioner will be like: independent, with statutory powers and resources and inspection rights, a clear voice, engaged with children, and based on the UNCRC, with vision, commitment and principles. We'll have to highlight what we can't do and why, to show why a statutory Commissioner is essential. The nearest models are the Disability Rights Commission, and ideas in the Northern Ireland Children's Commissioner report.'

Working in partnerships The staff discussed building good relationships with 'key partners', from NGOs, to childcare managers, to the government's CYPU, and 'linking people together, especially children and decision-makers'. 'We've helped to promote smaller organisation and we're not big enough to threaten the larger ones.' They thought that working together with the Advisory Board, 'is in many ways our greatest success.'

Views about the Office The Office receives many supportive letters and comments from children and parents, and people who work with and for children including senior civil servants, politicians and NGO staff. For example, the Deputy Mayor said, at the launch of the *State of London's Children*, 'This is the most important meeting I have attended as Deputy Mayor of London,' and some weeks later, she remarked, 'I have been so impressed with the excellent report. Ken [the Mayor] and I are both citing it widely.' A message from the government's Social Exclusion Unit said, 'We have found the report *State of London's Children* accessible, useful and relevant. [Some chapters] discuss issues relating to projects we are currently working on.' The large GLA Children's Strategy Working Group includes three young members from the Office. Another member, who is head of a Borough Youth Services, said, 'I am a great fan of your work,' through working with the young members on the Strategy.

4. Summary of our tentative findings so far to answer our original evaluation questions

4.0 This final section uses the evaluation questions stated in our funding application in 2000 as headings, under which to summarise the answers we have arrived at so far, during autumn 2001. We must emphasise that we have studied only the first 18 months of a three-year project. It is too soon to judge most activities, as we could risk being misleadingly over- or under-optimistic or critical. We also consider plans for the second stage of the evaluation.

We tend to agree with the evaluative comments from children and adults reported above. Occasionally, contrasting views were advanced. For example, some of the Office staff were despondent about not achieving a high media profile, whereas others were pleased at the coverage they achieved: 'it is a constant drip'; 'we get lots of small slots'. Whose assessment we should accept? Both views are important. The first response is realistic about the enormous efforts and changes required if the media are one day to become as respectful towards children, and their rights and status, as they generally are towards adults. The media are no longer as casually contemptuous towards black, gay or disabled people, as they are towards young people. However, the alternative optimistic response is also realistic, because the more discouraging the climate, the greater the achievement if favourable reports are published. And also, in view of the difficulties, it is vital to sustain hope and enthusiasm by celebrating hard won achievements, rather than being too discouraged.

4.1 Are the Office's aims for each year realistic, the methods for achieving them suitable and well enough resourced? Did the aims need to be revised? If so, how and why?

4.2 Year by year what achievements do young people and adults working at the Office consider they have attained? How do these compare with what they aimed to achieve?

In summary, the Office aims to demonstrate the need for a Children's Rights Commissioner, and to work towards transforming London into a world-class child-friendly city that implements the UNCRC and involves children as active citizens. Whilst some aims may be unattainable or over-ambitious, for an organisation to do well, it may wish to keep the sights high; to go for dreams as well as more limited objectives. Staff morale, drive and achievement may be enhanced where aims are high; and if more modest achievements are seen as part of a bigger picture, then they can carry conviction and also further increase motivation. The eventual goals are attained through first laying foundations and making many small steps. The Office has achieved important steps, notably in its working methods, reports, public events, capacity building and networks (see 2.1-3.5 above). With such few resources, the Office has to work mainly as a catalyst

to prompt others to change and act, and to help them set up structures and alliances to enable this.

As a demonstration project, the Office is making the case in three main ways for the need to appoint a Children's Rights Commissioner. Firstly, the Office is creating services and responding to needs in the unique way that a statutory Commissioner is best suited to take over. This includes advocating all children's UNCRC rights, increasing their participation at every level, and helping to set up the Children's Strategy with all its potential. Secondly, the Office's Reports draw new attention to the serious, complex and neglected needs of children, with an authoritative voice informed by original data analyses and contact with many children. Although overlapping in this work with other NGOs, the Office uniquely concentrates its attention and energy on London's children and young people and matters that affect them. This concentration can help to strengthen the Office's case and information sources, through its understanding of the daily reality of young Londoners' lives. Thirdly, the Office and the CRAE are working with over 50 other children's organisations to agree on minimum standards for a Children's Rights Commissioner (see appendix 3).

There is some evidence that resources and staffing were insufficient to do the planned tasks. One person left partly because there was insufficient administrative support. The first Director's brief initially included the task of writing *The State of London's Children*; she had to divert funds and appoint a temporary Research Officer to do this work. She would also have liked to have more regular contact with the media organised by a skilled publicity and marketing person. The heavy workload and the short-term character of the Office may have led to at least one person to leave to take up a more permanent post.

One change of plan was the early decision to persuade the Mayor to adopt a Children's Strategy. This could strengthen the work of the Children's Rights Commissioner, such as by stating standards against which to assess London's plans and services, and giving the Commissioner authority to expect that the GLA's stated policies are implemented. Projects such as the big survey and the Big Meeting were developed by the advisers and staff. The Office appears to combine necessary flexibility with careful planning firmly based on the UNCRC.

Main achievements so far include: the close involvement of young people in the Office work (2.1A2-A8, 3.1-3.5.), and in creating, teaching and applying participation methods; persuading the Mayor to adopt a Strategy for London's Children (2.1A2-3, 3.144, 3.151, 3.16); the *Sort it out!* survey and its use as the basis for future policy work (2.1A2-3, 3.142, 3.151, 3.16); writing child-friendly versions of GLA policy reports and conducting other preparation and training so that young people can join in policy debates (2.1A2-5, 3.1-3.6, 3.141-3.142, 3.144-3.145, 3.151, 3.16); the Big Meeting (2.1A4-5, 3.1, 3.5, 3.6); the *State of London's Children* Report (2.2, 3.142, 3.145-6, 3.16); alliances made with many individuals and agencies working with and for children (2.1A1-A8, 3.1-3.15, 3.141-3.146, 3.15-3.16) and the strengthening both of older alliances and of children's participation in them; furthering the campaign to have a Children's Rights Commissioner appointed (2.1A1-2.1A3, 2.1A6-8, 2.2, 3.141-3.16).

4.3 *What social and political context (theories and policies) is the Office working in? And therefore how likely is the Office to achieve its aims? (see 1.41-1.43 above)*

The social context includes the following complications:

- * widespread wariness and even hostility towards children's rights;
- * the innovative courage needed to propose, let alone demonstrate, that children can contribute seriously to city-wide policy making;
- * the inability of the London Mayor to implement even his priority transport policies, when he is squeezed between more powerful national and local authorities;
- * the many ways in which London, like all cities, functions to suit adults and tends to exclude children socially, politically and economically;
- * the way that the Office cannot work by command, but only by persuasion.

This last complication means that the Office has to rely on using careful argument, networking and strategy, on promoting evidence of what works well, on using different approaches with different groups, gaining endorsement by authorities, and other methods recommended, for example, by Lansdown (1996). Earlier sections have shown some use of these methods. Whether a Children's Rights Commissioner is appointed will depend on public opinion, experts' advice to politicians and, ultimately, on politicians' views about the expedience of such an appointment: will it be vote-catching and popular, cost-effective or at least offering more benefits than problems, and not too threatening to politicians' interests? Public concerns about children's health and surgery led to the slightly similar appointment of a Child Health Tsar. But this move on child health can be seen as an effort to prevent litigation and to improve the protection of children and provision of services for them. A Children's Rights Commissioner, besides supporting all provision and protection rights for children, would be concerned with their somewhat more controversial participation rights. Although government departments and the GLA are showing some interest in children's participation, they need further persuasion before considering the appointment of such a Commissioner seriously. England will soon, however, be the only part of Britain not to have a statutory Children's Commissioner. The next 18 months will show whether the Office will be able to achieve its main aim.

4.4 How do set-backs, hindrances and opportunities towards implementing the Office's aims, as perceived by the Office and ourselves, change over time, and why?

This is a question for the second part of the evaluation.

4.5 How do collective versus individualistic notions of rights advance or impede support for children's rights?

Children are developing valuable ways to address prejudices against their rights. They demonstrate that they can understand and share in policy making, in making improvements in their communities, and in exercising some rights responsibly. The UNCRC also provides a clear language of entitlement and justice, which are urgent concerns among children even if they do not at first use rights language. The children we met wanted to be respected for their contributions, and to know more about legal rights and freedoms. As the children also impressed on us, participation rights do not have to be selfish or confrontational claims; they can be expressions of mutual respect, concern and reciprocal care. This was particularly discussed by those who had suffered rejection (asylum seekers, care leavers) and who emphasised rights within relationships. They spoke of feeling respected and helped by kind, welcoming adults and other children. Discussions about caring have been criticised as splitting the measurable activities from the elusive emotions, labour from love, and thereby missing the essence of care which fuses these two (Graham 1983). Similarly, children's rights tend to be seen as cold, even threatening, quasi-legal standards, and not also as mutual concerns which fuse respect with care. One way to respond to adults' criticisms about children's rights is to promote concepts of rights as expressions of solidarity and reciprocal care.

4.6 What city-wide processes, methods and media for communicating are involved in establishing and organising the Office's work with and for children? How well does the Office think these are working?

Sections 2 and 3 above have described a range of methods that appear to be working very well. The Office's young advisers' views are given in sections 3.1-3.5 and those of the staff in 3.16. Successful media for communication include child-friendly reports and surveys, meetings and training courses, and the lively Office web page designed with children. Children from all 33 boroughs responded to the *Sort it out!* Survey, though the uneven responses suggested varying enthusiasm among the adults who were asked to distribute many of the questionnaires. The present support among many adults for the Office's varied projects suggests that interest among children and adults will continue to grow.

An original plan, intended to give the Office a high media profile and popular appeal, was to appoint famous people to be honorary figurehead Commissioners, like the UNICEF ambassadors (2.1 above). The staff decided that they did not have time to inform, support and involve such people in the complicated task of public and media advocacy of children's rights.

4.7 How are tensions, disagreements and misunderstandings about aims and methods resolved, and common purposes promoted, between groups advocating children's rights, and between them and those they hope to influence?

Although working on contentious issues, the Office staff and advisers seem to cope with challenges well, partly through mutual and humorous support, and willingness to discuss criticisms and problems among themselves openly. Disagreements are resolved between the Office, allies such as other NGOs, and groups they hope to influence, by numerous formal and informal discussions. These help to promote common purposes, as do the joint projects, such as working on the GLA Children's Strategy. The Office's publications can help to persuade Londoners of children's many and complex needs, rights and opportunities, which are not well served by currently fragmented and excluding policies.

The Office does, however, face double binds. Our evaluation part 2 will review how these are managed through making compromises between the following contrasting, although not necessarily always opposing, values:

- * keeping to clear consistent aims while being responsive to children's views and changing circumstances;
- * combining work that is child-friendly and children's-rights-led with being a formidable highly respected organisation;
- * being supportive but not over-protective in advocacy with and for children - a group the adult staff do not belong to;
- * taking due credit for their achievements (partly in order to maintain morale and public support) but also letting other agencies claim credit for progress, justly or not, when this can aid that progress;
- * involving and working with other agencies to persuade all authorities actively to respect children's rights and also to support a Children's Rights Commissioner who may challenge statutory policies and services;
- * being fully committed to a programme of work which will end with closing the Office so that it may be replaced by other agencies;
- * ensuring that the future Commissioner arrangements combine the power of statutory agencies with the critical independence of voluntary ones.

1.8 Future evaluation, phase 2

We have to reserve comment on many issues, especially outcomes of the Office's 3-year term that cannot be known until summer 2003 or later. Like the Office, our work was limited by a low budget, and partly because of this, we concentrated in phase 1 on collecting ephemeral data (the passing views and experiences that would not otherwise be recorded). The evaluation phase 2 will complement this evidence by examining formal records kept from 2000-2003. We also plan to observe Advisory Board and GLA meetings in order to give more detailed reports about children as political contributors, with the related views of all groups concerned. We will meet similar groups to those reported in section 3, to note any clear changes in their views about children's rights in London and the work of the Office. We have been working on evaluation aims, theories, methods and base line data to develop as the Office work evolves and concludes. This will include learning more about children's views on how to make services, amenities and political processes accessible and acceptable to them, adaptable and respectful of their rights (Thomasevski 1999:13). We will collaborate with the Office to complement their

own evaluations and to avoid unnecessary duplication.

Phase 2 will evaluate:

- how the Office continues to carry out its aims and develop its work;
- how the Office collaborates with other agencies and individuals in exchanging information and working for children's rights;
- the Office's methods of mobilising action to create London-wide perspectives and movements for change, based on the UNCRC;
- related changes in national, regional and local government policy and practice;
- related changes in the state of London's children and the views of children and adults in London about children's rights and the work of the Office;
- progress on plans for the national Children's Rights Commissioner;
- how the Office's unique and unfinished tasks are transferred to other agencies so that they may be continued from 2003 onwards.

Outcomes of phase 1 of the evaluation

- * Illustrated short version of this end-of-project report for young people
- * Photo albums by refugee and asylum seeker children and by young Travellers about their rights
- * Video by primary students, 'New to Newham: Learning about our Rights!'
- * Questions raised by young care leavers and used in our interviews with CROs.
- * Funding application for a video and educational project, initiated by care leavers. The video is being made during Summer 2000.
- * Funding application to the ESRC on 'Social impacts of national and local policies on young people's lives in Traveller communities' developed with young and adult Travellers
- * Lecture by Lorna Clarke-Jones and Heike Schaumburg to Brunel conference on Childhood Anthropology, June 2001.
- * Keynote lecture to New Zealand conference on Children and their Environments by Priscilla Alderson, June 2001.
- * Article in *Community Care* 'Seen but not heard' by Lorna Clarke-Jones (April 2002).
- * Article by Heike Schaumburg on NGO interviews 'Who sets the agenda? NGO staff talk about making the case for a Children's Rights Commissioner' (submitted).
- * Article by Priscilla Alderson and Heike Schaumburg 'Working with children and young people on evaluation' in the e-version of the *Evaluation* journal.

Making the case for a Children's Rights Commissioner

England needs a statutory Children's Rights Commissioner. This is the view of growing numbers of children's agencies. At present, services affecting children (aged 0-17 years) are inadequate and fragmented, and children are unnecessarily excluded from many areas of public life. A generic Children's Rights Commissioner could monitor all services and amenities that affect children, with an agenda based on the United Nations 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). The UNCRC, ratified by the British Government in 1991, covers children's *provision* rights to essential goods and services, their rights to *protection* from abuse, neglect and discrimination, and also their *participation* rights. These include children's rights to express their views on matters that affect them and to have their views taken seriously, their rights of access to relevant information, to peaceful association and assembly, and to respect for their physical and mental integrity. The Office of Children's Rights Commissioner for London (the Office) was set up to work from 2000-2003 to demonstrate the case for a Children's Rights Commissioner. This article is based on an evaluation of the first half of the Office's life. So far, the main tasks achieved by the Office, that point to the need for, and the feasibility of, a Commissioner, include:

* Involving children in the Office from the start, to demonstrate how they can share in appointing staff, they can plan and carry out activities, run meetings and training sessions, produce lively informative reports, speak through the mass media, and contribute to policy meetings at all levels of London life; Conducting the *Sort it out!* Survey, and 'Send a card to Ken' (London Mayor) campaign, to collect and promote children's own views on living in London.

* Publishing *the State of London's Children* Report which graphically shows numerous inter-related problems for London's children, and their need for new coordinated child-rights-based city-wide planning and monitoring of services that affect them.

* Developing the Mayor's Children's Strategy with the Greater London Assembly (GLA) and London Mayor, besides work with politicians on all other aspects of London life that affect children.

* Creating active networks across London that involve adults and children, service providers and users, statutory and voluntary agencies aiming to promote children's rights in policy and practice.

* Basing all the Office's work on the UNCRC as a coherent, comprehensive, internationally agreed agenda. Creating a unique and essential programme of work that only a Children's Rights Commissioner could continue and expand.

Background For years, Children's Organisations have been urging the British Government to appoint Children's Rights Commissioners. The Government reports regularly to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child which also advocates this move. Initiated in the Scandinavian Ombuds system, Children's Commissioners now exist around the world. They vary in having a comprehensive or narrow remit, and in how they emphasise children's provision and protection rights, or their participation rights when they contribute as young citizens. England will soon be the only region in Britain not to have a Children's Commissioner. The Office was planned as a practical and publicity project to help politicians and the public to recognise the urgent need to appoint a Commissioner for England with regional networks.

Working with children and promoting their views As a demonstration project, the Office shows how effectively children can become involved in complex plans and activities. The Advisory Board members, aged 10-17 years, play a full part in the Office's activities, showing how well this can work, and providing models for other organisations on how to achieve effective working relations between paid staff and voluntary members of any age. The Advisory Board, set up before the Office was opened, helped to appoint the staff. Members plan enjoyable training and information events, such as the Big Meeting for 500 children in May 2001. This showed that meetings about rights can be fun and interesting, and the politicians who attended listened to children seriously. The *Sort it out!* survey involving nearly 3,000 children, and the 'Send a card to Ken' (London Mayor) campaign ensured that politicians knew that children had firm and informed views about their city and about 'perfect' and 'nightmare' cities.

For volunteers and staff to work together without tokenism is complex and very time-consuming. One young adviser warns against casually trying 'to show off that your organisation involves young people...You might as well just put 20 children on a wheelbarrow and wheel them out to public events and say that you have young people involved, than go to the trouble of setting up an Advisory Board.'

Children as the unit of analysis Statistics about children as a specific group are often lost between records about differing age groups (0-4 or 7-12 years) or larger units ('family', 'school', 'borough'). Then the impact on children, when new roads or council budgets are planned, cannot be assessed and is often ignored. The Office's *State of London's Children* Report takes the 1.65 million people aged 0-17 years, almost one quarter of all Londoners, as the unit of analysis. It recalculates local and national records to report their social conditions in 2001. Based on the UNCRC, the Report reveals numerous inter-related problems for London's children, and the need for coordinated child-rights-based city-wide planning and monitoring of services that affect them.

A few points from the Report illustrate its importance. London is one of the wealthiest cities in the world, but 15 out of the 17 poorest boroughs in England are in London; 43% of London's children live in poverty. Extremes of wealth and poverty make it even harder for poor families, when living costs are so high for housing, transport and leisure amenities. Many residential parts of London lack safe, clean open spaces, and have dangerous traffic-filled streets. Poverty

compounds other disadvantages: poor children have higher rates of physical and mental illness, injury and mortality. Inner London children have poor average educational achievement levels. They have the highest rates in England of school exclusions, crimes between young people including robbery and drug offences, of being 'looked after' by local authorities, and of homelessness: an estimated 25,000 children although no accurate records are kept of them or of other children in greatest need, such as asylum seekers or Travellers. Over a third (of under 16s) belong to an ethnic minority (three times higher than for the UK).

The Report includes children's own views to inform indicators of their well-being. It provides planning tools and baselines, for follow-up reports to check how the state of London's children will alter for better or worse, and how to advocate for improvements. The Report has been widely praised and will be used as a model in other regions and also for a regular national report.

The Children's Strategy The GLA Act in 1998 set eight strategies for the Mayor and did not mention children. The Office quickly persuaded the Mayor to begin drafting and consulting on a Children's Strategy. All the other Strategies, such as on Transport or the Environment, also strongly affect children's daily lives and children are now being consulted about them. To facilitate this, the Office staff produced short clear versions of committee documents. Staff and adult members on regional and national policy committees have also found these to be very useful. Thus the Office is setting up methods and structures for involving children, as current and future models for many other agencies. Work on the Children's Strategy proceeds very slowly, as it does on the other Strategies including the Mayor's priority, Transport.

Working through networks The Office has no statutory powers. It has to work by advocacy, persuasion and encouraging networks between adults and children, service providers and users, and the statutory and voluntary agencies working with and for children. The work demonstrates the value of concentrating on children's rights and interests in a specific region, linking evidence to policy. It also demonstrates the need for a stronger and better resourced authority, a Children's Rights Commission, to continue and expand this work.

The children's rights-based agenda The Office's work is based on the UNCRC as a coherent, comprehensive, internationally agreed agenda. Children's rights are still widely criticised and described as undermining parents' rights and compromising children's protection and development. Children are assumed to be too inexperienced and pre-rational to be rights-holders. Rights are seen as expressions of selfish individualism that is incompatible with childhood dependence. However, much recent research has shown flaws in the theories and methods of research that attempted to 'prove' the limitations of children's knowledge, skills and agency. Women won respect for their rights by showing they are different from men but not necessarily inferior. Similarly, children can gain similar respect when unfounded prejudices about them are re-analysed. Recent research provides examples of young children's complex competencies and decision-making, and their understanding of rights as founded in altruistic mutual respect. International research shows how diverse childhoods can be: young children

are respected as competent in some cultures and not in others, so that incompetence may be in the eye of the beholder rather than in the child. The Office promotes children's rights by promoting information about their meaning and value, and by enabling children to demonstrate how realistic and effective their participation rights can be when put into practice.

Conclusion

As a demonstration project, the Office is making the case for the need to appoint a Children's Rights Commissioner:

- * to continue and expand the unique and essential work begun by the Office;
- * to promote practical respect for all children's UNCRC rights as a generic Commissioner and not, like the Welsh Commissioner, confined to social services issues;
- * to increase children's participation at every level following models developed by the Office;
- * to produce regular reports, with child-friendly summaries, that draw attention to children's serious and neglected needs, with an authority informed by original data analysis and direct contact with many children;
- * to be adequately resourced (unlike the Office) and able to support related research and innovative projects;
- * to be able to comment freely, independently and publicly on all matters that affect children;
- * to have statutory powers to inspect and monitor services, set standards, call officials to account, follow up complaints to a satisfactory outcome; promote formal networks, advise and report to Government at all levels, and require ministers to conduct regular child-impact reviews.

During the first half of its 3-year term, the Office has collaborated with over 50 other children's organisations. The Office has worked as a capacity builder and a catalyst towards making a strong case for a Commissioner and towards making London a more child-friendly and child-rights-respectful city. The Office has ambitious and partly aspiration aims. As one of the Office staff said, 'It's as if we are making pathways, leaving footprints behind of our tools and experiences, so that it will be easier for others to follow along after we're gone...Children are so oppressed and they know it. We point the way forward for thinking, moving in the right direction to achieve cultural change.'

About the study In 2000, researchers at the Social Science Research Unit were invited to evaluate the progress of The Office of Children's Rights Commissioner for London over its three-year term. Phase 1 of the evaluation, up to autumn 2001, was funded by the Joseph Rowntree Foundations, Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation and the Tedworth Trust. Phase 1 has looked mainly at processes, influential factors and early outcomes. The process evaluation included interviews and participant observations with adults and children around London. This article has concentrated on one of the Office's several aims.

Appendix 2 Background on the Social Science Research Unit evaluation

We addressed two main overlapping themes: the work of the Office, and the changing state of London's children, and specifically knowledge of and respect for their rights. Our funding application included aims to work with children and young people, the wider public, organisations serving children, and politicians and officials at varying levels of London government, and to examine, with these groups:

- * the extent of knowledge about the UNCRC;
- * theoretical and practical commitment to implementation of the Office's aims;
- * opportunities for and barriers to implementation of the aims;
- * and activity towards implementing the aims.

Our plans emphasised co-operation with the Office so that we would complement and not duplicate their internal monitoring and evaluation work, their detailed records and systematic reviews of their work. The Office planned to develop indicators of children's community involvement and participation in decision-making as a basis for assessing the effectiveness of the Office. Our external evaluation was intended to focus on:

- * children and young people, including 'socially excluded' groups;
- * the wider public;
- * organisations working with and for children, including community groups;
- * politicians and officials involved in various levels of London government.

Our grant application in 2000 added: 'Too many factors are involved to permit evaluation of the specific impact of the Office. However, the contributing influence of the Office is likely to be indicated by marked changes which can be assessed over three years, in, for example:

- * direct acknowledgement of the Office;
- * transitions towards the use of rights language in children's services;
- * more positive and fewer negative reports about children and their rights in local newspapers and other public media;
- * schools which set up more democratic and inclusive structures;
- * youth councils which are established and are effective;
- * increased access for disabled children.
- * local authority plans for children's services and for provision for children in general services;
- * local authority policies and budgets which show the proportions of services and funding allocated specifically to children in relation to the whole;
- * involvement of young advisers in promoting inclusion, anti-racism and crime prevention, traffic calming, and other practical policies and activities.'

We especially aimed to involve children in developing methods and criteria based on their perspectives and experiences, in order to:

- assist adults and children who assess amenities and policies in London and in other cities and

towns;

demonstrate how children can be much more fully involved in evaluating policies and services;

show the importance and advantages of consulting with them, and of learning from their experiences, such as of racism, disability, poverty or crime; and record good practice methods of working with them on evaluations;

promote changes in policy and practice which are likely to support and strengthen local communities and relationships between ethnic groups and generations.

We planned to:

recruit small specialist groups through, for instance, schools, housing estates and other community settings, and local media;

involve a range of people, including children and young people who are disabled, or have experienced racism, poverty or other disadvantages. (Ward 1997; JRF *Findings*; Willow 1997; Johnson et al 1998; Morris 2000; Alderson 2000a; O'Quigley 2000);

involve them as advisers and researchers on devising evaluation criteria, sharing in collecting, collating, analysing and evaluating data, working out conclusions and recommendations, and disseminating results through conferences and the media.

The main tasks of the research staff were:

to be receptive and realistic, encouraging 'brainstorming' style sessions and also meticulous critical selection and planning sessions;

to help the young people to attempt feasible programmes in small steps;

to help them to share and delegate the work, to support their activities and to undertake tasks they would prefer the adults to do;

to help them to select the most appropriate methods and timetabling;

to help them to solve problems, for example, when it is hard to arrange to meet, other methods of contact could be arranged;

to keep consulting with children and adults in Britain and elsewhere who have experience of working together in similar projects;

to use participative appraisal methods (Johnson et al 1995);

to draw on literature and our national and international contacts with Children's Rights Commissioners and with advisory, research and evaluation projects which involve young people;

to adapt an SSRU questionnaire about children's rights already used in schools which gives out as well as collecting in information;

to include group discussions, individual interviews and questionnaires.

SSRU self-evaluation

The main areas and omissions in our work.

- We worked with many young people and adults, using a variety of methods, and they gave us vivid and varied insights into the state of London's children and their rights.

- We also gathered evidence about the Office's progress in several ways.
- We concentrated on collecting ephemeral data (people's passing and not otherwise recorded views, experiences, activities, accounts of events during 2000-2001) which we could never recapture later. We plan to compare these with similar evidence collected in 2002-2003.
- Our theoretical work on evaluation makes a new contribution to an area dominated by the views of adult authorities, with little scope for children's challenges.
- We did not do a large questionnaire survey because the Office did one.
- We did not attempt to do a review of the state of London's children because the Office conducted their own authoritative review.
- We have not done formal reviews of the literature, the media, official reports, international comparisons or other recorded evidence (though we read many related reports in a rapidly growing field) because, as these are all recorded, they are less urgent. We can do these reviews later when we have more time and funding.
- We did not manage to convene our own group of generic young evaluators. Instead we met with several different groups, on their own grounds and within their particular concerns. We met young members of the Office Advisory Board individually and at some of their public events, and were not able to arrange a meeting with them all.
- We aimed to plan research projects from scratch with young people, based in their own priorities. This has been achieved. A school group of young asylum seekers and refugees went on to use participatory methods, devised by the Office, to explore their rights in their community, after working with us on their rights in school (3.7). One group of care leavers gave us questions to ask the Children's Rights Officers (3.9). Another group is making a training video for social services staff on their experiences and the new Care Leavers Act, based on their ideas in a grant application which we helped to write (3.10). Heike's work with young Travellers (3.11), on their sense of ethnic identity and the extra hardships for families in which the parents are aged under 18, was the topic of an ESRC application.

Appendix 3. What does evaluation mean? Selecting theories and methods

This appendix discusses why we selected certain theories and methods, and problems with conventional evaluation methods.

`Top down' or `bottom up' approaches

An ideal model of evaluation is to examine a precise simple intervention, using controlled, easily comparable, and relatively static samples, in statistically significant quantities, to gain clearly measurable before and after effects. There is consensus about the topics and methods of the evaluation, and the purpose and benefits of the interventions. Results are accepted as unequivocal, replicable, predictable and generalisable, and as the self-evident basis for policy recommendations. Authoritative people oversee the whole `top-down' process (Thom et al. 1999).

Complications In contrast, the Office is making many complex, evolving interventions, in an incomparable city, with too much variety and fluctuation to obtain clearly measurable or attributable and statistically significant before and after data. Interim assessments may be misleadingly too positive or negative. Instead of consensus, there is controversy about the nature of children's abilities, rights, participation and citizenship, about methods of evaluating these, and about the purpose and benefits of promoting children's rights. Results are therefore liable to be seen as equivocal, non-replicable, unpredictable and hard to generalise from. Connections between evidence of change and policy recommendations are therefore unlikely to be accepted as self-evident. Less powerful people - children and their advocates - are trying to change authoritative groups and structures, with less possibility of achieving control or consensus over processes or outcomes.

Defining evaluation Debates about the many disputed definitions and methods of evaluation are actually debates about ideals and politics (Murphy et al, 1998:215-239), `because evaluation entails differing views about what society is and ought to be like' (Hamilton et al, 1997:25). Two definitions are often used with regard to health promotion.

1). An outcome evaluation is designed to establish whether or not an intervention works by changing the pre-specified outcomes (such as knowledge, attitudes, intentions, behaviour, service use).

2) A process evaluation examines the acceptability and feasibility of an intervention, studies the ways in which the intervention is delivered, and assesses the quality of the procedures performed by the programme staff. It is designed to describe what goes on, but also considers whether or not the programme achieves its objectives, and may suggest ways of improving the programme design and implementation (Harden 2001).

Ann Oakley defines evaluation, acknowledging the disagreements, in the following way.

The most economical way of defining evaluation is as 'the process that will enable us to learn from experience' (Turner et al. 1989: 316). Different approaches are tried, for example to prevent young people taking up smoking;...or to reducing accidents among children;...but these endeavours cannot yield clear lessons unless there has been some attempt at cumulative analytical description. Evaluation can thus also be seen as a set of procedures which judge 'the worth of an activity' (Peberdy 1997:73). It is something we all do in everyday life, and it has two essential components: setting standards against which the doing of something can be judged; and deciding whether or not the activity in question meets those standards.

Most evaluation criteria (standards) fall under five headings: effectiveness - the extent to which stated goals are met; appropriateness - the relationship to need; acceptability - to the recipients; equity - whether there is equal provision for those with the same needs; and efficiency - a criterion which involves some calculation of relative costs and benefits (Philips et al. 1994). ['Evaluation'] aims to describe both processes and outcomes, that is to answer questions about why something happens as well as those about whether it works or not (Coyle et al. 1991).

Evaluation research is a subset of research in general. This means that there are other important research questions which are not directly related to implementation or effectiveness, the dominant concerns of evaluation.' The further questions may concern developing theories, or questioning how priorities are selected or how associations between phenomena occur (Oakley 2001).

Process evaluations are aimed at elucidating and understanding the internal dynamics of how a programme, organisation or relationship operates [focussing] on the following kinds of questions. What are the things people experience which make this program what it is? What are the strengths and weaknesses of the program? How are clients brought into the program and how do they move through the program once they are participants? What is the nature of staff-client interactions?' (Patton, 1990:95).

Process evaluation can document a demonstration project or a model, like the Office, which is worth replicating: 'by describing and understanding the dynamics of program processes', by isolating elements which critically contribute to success or failure (Patton, 1990:95-6), and by promoting 'particular interests and values' (Macdonald, 1987:43-4).

We used an 'enlightenment' model of evaluation, sharing some information and options with the Office, rather than an 'engineering' model of trying to influence or control (Finch 1986; Harland 1996). For example, this report is meant to inform the Office about our findings with the aim of presenting a range of views and suggestions for debates (Parlett 1981:224-5; Hood 2000), but not as judges, guides or advisers. As 'democratic' researchers we aimed to be neither clearly detached from, nor involved with, the Office, though we share their commitment to the UNCRC as the basis of their work. We too are accountable to less powerful groups (Burgess 1989), such as the young advisers for

whom we wrote a version of this report.

Summary of tendencies in conventional evaluations A special issue of *Children & Society*, on evaluating community initiatives for (*sic*) children (Utting et al 2001), makes numerous valuable points on appropriate, equitable, accountable methods. Yet the papers omit to mention: children's rights; children's direct views (except the comment that they value friendships, which are ignored in most evaluations, p 48); children explicitly as stake holders and evaluators themselves; the many research and activity projects that have been conducted with and by children. There is simply an odd reference to a US paper asserting that the risks of harm to children involved in research may have been over-estimated (p 30). Yet it is more relevant to assess the benign/harmful nature of each project, than to talk of a general abstract impact of doing research on children. And 'doing' is too often confined to gathering data, and ignores the huge impact on countless young people of research reports that criticise or adversely stereotype them may have (Alderson 1995). More evaluations now involve children directly (such as Cockburn 1998; Roberts 2000; Aldgate and Statham 2001). However, the *Children & Society* issue and much of the other literature we have reviewed highlight the following current tendencies in typical evaluations.

- 1 Children's own views are rarely sought
- 2 Children are seldom explicitly seen as stake holders or contributors
- 3 Children tend to be seen as objects to be measured in order to assess outcomes, rather than as measurers and agents who share in designing and conducting evaluations
- 4 Children's rights are rarely acknowledged
- 5 Evaluations are usually conducted by powerful groups on less powerful ones when controlling methods and clear measures are funded and applied 'top down'
- 6 Concern with future outcomes may: a) under-value children's present lives – Sure Start states concern that 'children are ready to flourish when they go to school' rather speaking of their flourishing during their first years while they are in Sure Start programmes; b) silence children by ignoring their views of processes during evaluations which may greatly affect them for better or worse; c) underestimate vital interim small outcomes on the way towards the major selected ones; d) justify oppressive means in order to achieve ends desired by adults
- 7 Concern with cost-effectiveness may reject important but expensive projects, and favour cheaper but trivial ones
- 8 Concern with feasibility may reject important but hard-to-achieve projects, and favour ones that are easier to achieve, and outcomes that are easier to measure, but are less relevant to children's interests
- 9 Concern for independence and objectivity may prevent evaluators from adopting sensitive, flexible and appropriate methods when in contact with children and with the adults who live or work most closely with them

10 Simple interventions with clear before and after measures are favoured.

Our selected methods

The above review lists conventional evaluation methods. But these are not helpful in endeavours such as the children-rights-led Office. This appendix is intended to explain why we have adopted, as far as possible, the following aims, criteria and methods we share with the Office.

- 1 To be led by children's and young people's views
- 2 To see children as key 'stake holders' and contributors
- 3 To work with children as measurers and agents who share in designing and conducting evaluations
- 4 To take the 1989 UNCRC as an agreed optimal basis for practice and research, and to aim to be equitable and inclusive.
- 5 To see how less powerful groups try to change more powerful ones using 'bottom up' and inevitably less controlled methods
- 6 To value children's flourishing in the present as much as in the future, listening to their views about subtle and interim, as well as major and future, processes and outcomes
- 7 To see the value of starting on important but expensive projects, even if they are under funded and unfinished
- 8 To respect very-hard-to-achieve aims and aspirations when they are highly relevant to children's interests
- 9 To combine sensitive, flexible methods with appropriate independence and objectivity/impartiality
- 10 To develop evaluation methods for complex, partial, multi-agency, city-wide interventions by the Office which mainly works as a catalyst rather than a service provider.

Participation The participation literature proposed varying approaches for assessing children's participation, including the following.

1. **Ladders** and levels of participation
2. **Topics**, issues and questions in which children are involved - policies, budgets, practical to abstract ideas
3. **Methods** and activities and practical processes in which children are involved, practical plans, brain storming, creativity, making changes, campaigning, meetings.
4. **Stages** of involving children with foresight and hindsight, from initial planning to final dissemination and work on implementing recommendations.
5. **Networks** and political levels of involvement – at family, group, school, community, local councils, regional, national, international levels
6. **Policies and structures** for involving children, official guidance, standards, strategies.

7. **Roles** in which young people are involved: outsiders or victims, contributors or advisers, members, chairs or directors of groups.
8. **Pros and cons** of involving children including impacts on children of initiatives when they are, or are not, involved
9. **Selection** of participants - convenience, random, stratified, elected or representative samples, whether they have constituencies they speak for and how democratic the selection/election might be.
10. **Perspectives** of parents, practitioners, policy makers, academics, children and young people, and people aged over 16 or 18 years (who may be quite hostile towards children).

Less often discussed is what seems to be the key issue to many young people:

11. **Purposes** of involving young people, motive, interests, and hidden agenda which might be served in each example.
12. **Relationships** - the quality of being involved - personal relationships, time, space, resources, trust, social capital

These notes were developed during the first phase of the evaluation and will be developed and applied during the second phase.

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The main topics into which these references may be grouped are: children's rights, participation and citizenship; childhood; local, regional and national policies, politics and economics affecting children; children's commissioners and rights officers; and methods of evaluation. There are numerous important references, including ones published since autumn 2001, that are not in this short list.

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