



**CYMORTH RESEARCH GRANTS 2007-8
Raising Your Voice RG 1223**

**Final Report
Executive Summary**

**'Raising Your Voice' is a joint research project undertaken
by Governors Wales and Markit Training and Consultancy Ltd.**

1. INTRODUCTION

The three main aims of the research were:

- To establish the ways in which young people, through their involvement in participation via school councils and/or associate pupil governorship, become engaged, involved and feel valued within their schools' decision making processes.
- To investigate the opportunities and the support in place to encourage young people's involvement in school governance.
- To explore the barriers that could discourage young people's involvement in school governance.

Specific issues to be explored included;

- The perceptions of young people about ongoing and active participation in the governance of their school.
- The barriers/challenges that may exist in young people becoming involved in school governance whilst at school and afterwards.
- The opportunities which currently exist to develop participation in school governance by young people.
- Identifying the future support needs of young people to promote their active participation in the governance of their school.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 Phase 1 - Scoping Research

An initial period of desk research was undertaken to establish the current position with respect to young people's involvement through the role of Associate Pupil Governor (APG) in Wales.

2.2 Phase 2 - Fieldwork

The consultation model was developed to gather qualitative feedback through focus groups of up to ten young people both involved or not currently involved in participation.

Following consideration of socio-demographic, cultural and geographical factors, a representative group of six secondary schools across Cardiff were selected.

The intention was also to consult with young people by means of the Cardiff Secondary Student Forum, however, this session was postponed due to staff changes.

Face to face or telephone interviews were completed with teachers, governors, Cardiff LEA Governor Support and Cardiff Governors association.

2.3 Phase 3 - Analysis and Reporting

Following analysis of feedback, key findings were identified and key recommendations for the future support of young people's involvement in their schools' governance were developed. In addition, opportunities will be sought to present the report to key stakeholder groups:

- Cardiff LEA Governors Services
- ADEW All Wales Governor Services Support Staff
- WAG Schools Management Division (governance) and YALO teams
- Governors Wales Management Committee or conference

3. SCOPING RESEARCH

The initial period of research focused upon the following documents;

1. ***Guidance for Governing Bodies on the Establishment and Operation of School Councils (Circular No: 42/2006)*** which provides guidance for head teachers and governing bodies regarding the establishment and operation of School Councils and arrangements for associate pupil governors in secondary schools.
2. An Estyn report published in February 2008 '***Having your say – young people, participation and school councils***' provided a position statement on the current extent to which secondary schools are complying with **The School Councils (Wales) Regulations 2005** and its subsequent guidance issued in 2006.
3. A report prepared by the Citizenship Foundation in England titled '***I Was A Teenage Governor – pupil governorship, initial thoughts and possibilities.***'

Extracts from the above can be found in the full report

4. FIELDWORK AND FEEDBACK

Fieldwork was undertaken as outlined in 2.2

Summarised feedback from each of the target groups consulted can be found below.

4.1 School Council Members

A variety of structures exist in schools, e.g. year councils, school councils, sixth form councils and learning forums, all are felt to play a key role in supporting the pupil participation agenda. The range of issues discussed varies from changes to school uniform to curriculum development with the ever present issue of school toilets .

Pupils reported that they wanted to make a greater contribution to issues such as curriculum choice, and teaching and learning.

The schedule for school council meetings varies but in general they meet once every half term. The agenda is often set following discussion with the link member of staff. The ways in which feedback is provided both to the governing body and to their peers varies enormously.

When asked “*What does the term governing body mean to you and who are governors?*” A variety of answers were given. In some cases little was known about why governing bodies existed except to manage the school and give prizes out. Other young people were more informed with one analogy given that “*The Head is the Manager of a football team ; the board is the governing body - overseeing what happens.*”

The majority of the pupils interviewed agreed that pupils should be involved with or listened to by their governing body, allowing them to give an alternative perspective whilst decisions were still under discussion.

All schools surveyed except for the special school had introduced APGs but not all were elected members of the school council. There was a mixed response from pupils when they were asked about their awareness of APGs and they were unsure of their election process . They felt that APGs should:

- Provide feedback from governing body meetings to the School Council and represent the views of the school council at governing body meetings
- Be involved with most topics discussed by the governing body except finance, staffing and matters involving other pupils.

Many pupils felt that they would find it useful to have a briefing session about what to expect before they attended a governing body meeting.

4.2 Non-school council members

Non school council members had a reasonable understanding of the school council election processes but had little insight into what happens within school council meetings and how they received feedback.

They had little concept or understanding of the governing body with the exception of two pupils whose parents had served as parent governors. They likened the governing body to the school council but for adults and that they had control over the school budget.

All felt they should be involved in the governing body and that it should not just be teachers who act as their link to the governing body. They felt that it should be the older, more experienced pupils who attended governing body meetings. All were unaware of the APGs and that they could be nominated by the school council.

They felt that it would be inappropriate for APGs to be involved in ‘personal stuff’ about other pupils and teachers. None felt that the APGs would need any specific training before becoming involved in the governing body.

4.3 Cardiff Secondary Schools Student Forum

The Cardiff Secondary Schools Student Forum was set up during academic year 2001-2, with

the aim of holding a forum session once per term with two nominees from each secondary school. The objectives of the schools forum were two fold:

- To facilitate an opportunity for key staff at local authority to consult with, listen to and respond to the views of young people from secondary schools across the city on all matters relating to education.
- To give pupils involved in participation within their individual schools the opportunity to network with young people from schools across the city to exchange experiences and ideas.

4.4 School Council Link Staff

The school council link staff interviewed had some awareness of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, but little insight into the Welsh Assembly Government's commitment to children's rights and pupil participation. They were aware that both school councils and APGs bore some relationship to this policy area. In all cases teachers fully endorsed the benefits that a school gains from having a commitment to pupil participation but felt that the concept of pupil participation is developing and trust needs to be built in terms of access to confidential information and expectations managed on both sides.

Feedback from and to the school council appeared to be relayed through members of the school leadership team or their line manager with little involvement of the link teacher.

The link staff interviewed felt they would like to be able to support school council members who became APGs. Ideas suggested included joint awareness raising, training and team building sessions.

4.5 Head teachers and Chairs of Governing Bodies

There was a widespread understanding of the need to have a school council but less knowledge about guidance relating the APGs, with a plea for further guidance and briefing from Welsh Assembly Government or LEA. There was a desire to find out what other schools were doing. Specifically it was felt that young peoples' involvement in participation:

- Gives pupils a sense of ownership of their school and their place within it.
- Helps to promote independent learners.
- Gives pupils greater involvement in their education and an opportunity to shape their futures.
- Encouraged staff to look at teaching methodologies and not to be afraid of involving pupils in decision about their teaching and learning experience .

Sensitivities outlined included:

- The need to carefully manage expectations both of the pupils and the governors to develop a mutual understanding of perspective and need.
- To ensure guidelines and terms of reference are established but not used as barriers and adhered to about issues for inclusion and confidentiality.

- The need for APGs to be trained or briefed about the workings of a governing body and how they could fit into the more formalised meetings and committee structure.
- A potential need for governors to be briefed about APGs and to be offered training on effective ways of involving APGs in the governance process.
- Governors who do not live or who are not involved within the school's community may need to develop an understanding of the needs and life experiences of pupils.
- For pupils with additional educational needs this process of involvement in participation needs to be handled sensitively to allow them to communicate their feelings without being influenced by people they do not know and trust.

It was strongly felt that governing body operations e.g. the timing, venues and running of meetings would need to be re-thought.

All felt that the role of APGs should be allowed to develop as there were many positive aspects, some of which were difficult to measure. It was felt that they should be involved in as much of the discussion and decision making as is possible within the current regulations.

4.6 Cardiff LEA Governor Support

The Governor Support team felt that a number of barriers needed to be overcome in ensuring APG inclusion across the city. These included;

- Overcoming uncertainty on both sides
- Timing and accessibility of meetings
- Developing and understanding in the role of APGs with governors
- Building a confidence in the extent of the role and the ability to manage expectation on both sides.
- Developing an understanding that agenda items need adapting to meet the needs of APGs

There was an overall feeling that APGs provided an opportunity to widen the expertise of the governing body and offered a direct line of feedback between the pupils and the governors.

The team felt that it would be useful for APGs to have induction training but this need not be separate from that offered to all new governors. The systems of the LEA Governor Support team at this stage, have no record of APGs, who they maybe or which school they represent.

4.7 Cardiff Governor Association

All present were aware of the mandatory requirement of school councils but there was less awareness of APGs due in the main to the balance of those present at the meeting representing the primary sector. All were in agreement that increasing opportunities for pupils' involvement in participation could facilitate:

- Increased pupil confidence.
- An alternative perspective that can make a difference.

If managed effectively pupil involvement in decision making can be a positive experience for both school councils, APGs and the governing body. In terms of listening and responding to the views of the pupils, it was felt to be important to have specific mechanisms in place within the school e.g. a school council link governor .

They voiced some perceived sensitivities such as:

- Managing expectations.
- Pupils /APGs attending meetings and partaking or being party to discussions relating to certain issues e.g. staff/pupil issues and finance.

However, it was felt that any negative aspects could be outweighed by the positive involvement of pupils in the management of their school.

5. ANALYSIS AND REPORTING

Following analysis of the feedback, a number of conclusions have been drawn and a series of recommendations for the future support and development of APGs and young people's involvement in the governance of schools have been formulated.

5.1 Conclusions

The research undertaken and the feedback received enabled us to draw conclusions about the development of associate pupil governorship in supporting young people's participation Cardiff Schools:

Note; the conclusions outlined below have both a national (N) and a local Cardiff (C) perspective.

5.1.a Awareness of the need to establish APGs varies across the key audiences surveyed.

- Head teachers have an awareness of the regulations but feel they require further guidance differentiated to each key audience to establish a process for establishing the role within the participation agenda in their school. (N)
- Chairs of governors and governors in general have a inconsistent awareness both of the regulations, guidance and role of APGs and how it could be used to support participation, strategic planning and inclusion. (C)
- Pupils only know what they are told about their role and the election process either by their headteacher or their school council link teacher. (C)
- LEA governor services staff have an awareness of the regulations and guidance but have at this early stage an incomplete overview of the introduction of APGs in schools across Cardiff. (C)

5.1.b All groups of participants felt that there was a need to produce a more comprehensive set of differentiated guidance for each audience on the establishment and development of APGs. (N)

5.1.c There was an indication that APGs and governors would benefit from targeted induction, training and support sessions. In particular APGs, would benefit from an insight into the formal purpose and workings of a school governing body. Whilst for governors an awareness raising session outlining how the operational aspects of governing body meetings could become more inclusive for young people. (N/C)

- 5.1.d** APGs, and in the wider context school councils members, would benefit from regular networking opportunities with others across their LEA and also at a sub-regional and All Wales level. (N/C)
- 5.1.e** One of the key issues that emerged was the inconsistent nature of regular feedback mechanisms between the governing body and school councils (and vice versa) using the APGs as the conduit. Most feedback encountered was of an informal or ad hoc basis. (N/C)

5.2 Recommendations

The following recommendations have been drafted to further encourage and support the development of young people's participation in Cardiff through their involvement in school councils/ associate pupil governorship.

Note: the recommendations have both a national (N) and a local Cardiff (C) implication.

- 5.2.a** Request the production of further guidance (N) on the status and development of associate pupil governance from the Welsh Assembly Government (WAG). The guidance should be differentiated to meet the needs of the key audiences:
- Young people
 - Heads and link teachers
 - Governors and governor support staff
- 5.2.b** The guidance (N) should cover aspects of developing of the role of APGs, inclusivity of governing bodies and feedback mechanisms. It would be useful to include case studies showing effective or emergent good practice.
- 5.2.c** Utilise the School Councils Wales website as an appropriate platform through which to promote support materials for young people who become APGs. (N)
- 5.2.d** Develop and promote a series of networking opportunities for APGs and school councils in Cardiff. For example, APGs could be linked via the Cardiff Secondary Schools Student Forum, which would provide a networking opportunity with other APGs across the city. Wider opportunities for networking by video conferencing with APGs in other LEAs across Wales could also be piloted. (C)
- 5.2.e** Plan and deliver awareness raising sessions for existing governors on the involvement and inclusion of APGs within governing body operations. (C)
- 5.2.f** Develop and offer an induction training session for APGs on governing body operations and practice. (C/N)
- 5.2.g** Suggest ways of providing a two way feedback process linking school council and governing body consultation and decision making (N/C)
- 5.2.h** Encourage Cardiff Governor Services to include APGs in governing body communications and support as appropriate.