

Children and Young People: Citizens of Today Seminar

**Peterborough Marriott Hotel
July 14-15, 2004**

Report

by Mark Tallentire



investing in children



research **in** practice

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This report was written by Mark Tallentire. Mark is a student at the University of Sheffield, studying towards a degree in Journalism Studies. Before moving to Sheffield, he lived and grew up in County Durham, and was involved for several years with the Investing in Children (IiC) initiative. He therefore brings to this report two perspectives: one as a trainee journalist experienced in the workings of the modern media, and the other as a young person living in County Durham.

The commissioning organisations

The ‘Children and Young People: Citizens of Today Seminar’ (henceforth referred to as ‘the seminar’) was commissioned by IiC and Research In Practice (RiP) (henceforth collectively referred to as ‘the commissioners’).

IiC is a public service-funded initiative based in County Durham and Darlington, which has established a regional, national, and international reputation for developing innovative ways in which children and young people can be enabled to contribute to political dialogue. It has an archive of over 100 reports, written by children and young people, about their perspective on the services they receive.

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RiP has a track record in promoting evidence-informed policy and practice development in the field of children and family services. It is a unique collaboration of over 75 agencies in England and Wales working together to improve outcomes for children through the best use of research knowledge. An initiative of the Association of Directors of Social Services, it is hosted by the Dartington Hall Trust in Devon, and has a second office within the University of Sheffield. It runs a website (www.rip.org.uk), publishes extensively in a variety of media and runs a wide range of learning and exchange events.

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Background

The initiative to set up the seminar came from a belief among the commissioners that steps needed to be taken to bridge the gap between policy and practice in the area of children's services. The commissioners believed that the two were often very different. At best, it was argued, policy was irrelevant to practice, and at worst it was damaging to the lives of children and young people. This situation needed, and still needs, to be rectified by policy producers and ground level policy practitioners coming together to co-ordinate their efforts, so that children and young people can be better served by their work. It was to this end, and to discuss the possible principles on which, and possible opportunities and ways in which, such work could be conducted, that the seminar was created.

Participants

The seminar brought together delegates from five main groups with influence over, and ownership of, children's services. These were: employees of central government, employees of local government, representatives of voluntary organisations, academia, and children and young people. The way in which the seminar was planned reflected the arguments behind the seminar. Children and young people were seen as full and capable participants in the seminar, who had a right to their place in the group.

The full list of participants was:

<p>Celia Atherton (<i>Research in Practice</i>) Jonathan Bradshaw (<i>York University</i>) Liam Cairns (<i>Investing in Children</i>) Emily Card (<i>Investing in Children</i>) Jenny Cooke (<i>Investing in Children</i>) Ashleigh Greathead (<i>Investing in Children</i>) Claire Hartley (<i>Department of Health</i>) Barbara Herts (<i>Department for Education and Skills</i>) Debbie Jones (<i>Health and Social Care, Durham County Council</i>) Peter Kemp (<i>Investing in Children</i>) Gerison Lansdown (<i>Freelance consultant, Children's Rights</i>) Hilary Spiers (<i>National Youth Agency</i>) Mark Tallentire (<i>Investing in Children, seminar rapporteur</i>) Cathy Thompson (<i>Department for Education and Skills</i>) Jason Yiannikou (<i>Department of Health</i>)</p>
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- It was the argument of the commissioners of the seminar that:
Children and young people occupy an ambiguous position within society. At different times, and in different debates, they are portrayed in different ways. They are seen as objects of concern- vulnerable and in need of protection.

They are seen as an investment opportunity for the future, to be carefully nurtured and prepared for responsibilities to come. They are seen as a threat to the community's sense of harmony and security, to be kept under close supervision and control. And occasionally, they are seen as citizens, with human rights guaranteed by International Convention.

- The commissioners noted from this position that:
Making sense of these often contradictory discourses is a challenge to everyone concerned with children and young people's issues, including children and young people themselves.
- But that there are currently opportunities to address these contradictions:
Through the National Service Framework for Children and the Green Paper 'Every Child Matters' this government has committed itself to an ambitious programme designed to provide a framework of universal services which promote good outcomes for all children and young people.
- However, the commissioners stated that if these opportunities were to be exploited, there was a point of critical importance in doing so which could not and must not be ignored:
We believe that, amongst a range of questions, consideration must be given to how relevant and effective proposals and policy initiatives appear to the children and young people, and families, who are to be their recipients/users.
- And to ensure this:

- Children and young people must be genuine participants in the policy dialogue
- Policy must respect and promote the human rights of children and young people
- Policies must be enacted now that assert the correct status of children and young people as citizens and rights holders
- Children and young people should be included in the reinvigoration of democracy
- Service users must not be stigmatised and isolated by targeted services, provided within a universal framework

(These points will henceforth be referred to as 'the agenda').

Aims of the seminar

- To find ways to implement the above agenda
- To listen to and learn from others
- To consider new potential partnerships which might progress the above agenda

Notes on the report from the author

The aim of this report is to reflect the discussions and debates which took place at the above seminar.

In it, I have generally abandoned chronology. I did not feel it important to note when a comment was made- it was what was said that meant it merited inclusion in the report. The only exceptions to this rule are particular instances where I have considered the timing of a comment important, and stated so. Instead, as a rule, I have drawn out particular themes which kept coming back through the seminar, and summarised the seminar's progress on them.

In its drafting process, all seminar participants were given the opportunity to make comments on the report. All comments and suggestions were considered, but final editorial control has remained with myself as author.

Initial thoughts

It is at the time of writing over a month since the seminar took place. I hope this has given all seminar participants time to consider what they heard, what they discussed, and what they resolved to do following the seminar. I would suggest that in terms of its original aims, the seminar was, to a large extent, flawed. In her introduction to the seminar, Celia Atherton said that its key goal was to form an action plan which could be followed to progress the agenda set out above. The seminar was about making practical steps and commitments to change, with set timescales. This was not achieved. No-one left the seminar with a document saying what they had to do to progress the agenda in the next week, month or 12 months.

This goal was not out of participants' reach. I accept the seminar lasted less than 24 hours and some of those present had never met each other before and had little understanding of their particular challenges in progressing the agenda, or perspectives on it, but, as Ashleigh Greathead commented to me: 'We need to give these people a kick up the backside and make them get things done'.

I strongly believe an action plan could have been achieved. However, it is not useful at this stage to dwell on why this goal was not achieved. For the purpose of this report, from my perspective, was to try to bring together what the seminar did produce and create from this an action plan which all participants have since agreed on.

Progress can still be made despite the failure to produce an action plan because this was just one of the three aims of the seminar listed earlier. The success or failure of the remaining two: to listen and learn from others, and to consider new partnerships which might progress the agenda, is not yet final. It will be proven by the actions of seminar participants in the months ahead.

The structure of this report

In **section 1** of the report I begin by highlighting one of the major problems IiC has come across time and again in working with children and young people to improve their lives and services, and the one which became the key theme of the seminar- respect. By using examples given at the seminar, I demonstrate how it is a simple lack

of respect for children and young people that often leads to ignorant attitudes among adult service-planners, and creates inadequate or damaging policies and services.

I continue to explain how we must eradicate this ‘respect gap’ between what is deserved and necessary and what is currently present, how we must make this change now if it is to be of any value to children and young people living today, and how now is our best chance to make the change, given the current political circumstances and climate regarding children’s services and government and public concerns. I close section 1 with a plea, given all of the above; to all reading this report to make the changes demanded in it their top priority.

In **section 2** of the report I move on from establishing the seminar’s basic argument for the progression of our agenda, to considering some of the challenges, opportunities and questions raised by the seminar which will affect our work to see the agenda achieved. These include the definition of ‘participation’, the relative values of statistical research and real-life, personal stories in progressing our arguments, and the need to mainstream our beliefs and the work of organisations such as IiC.

The report’s **section 3** reflects thinking and discussion which took place at the seminar regarding one particular area of children’s services which attracted much attention- education.

And finally, in **section 4**, I attempt to reconstruct an action plan and set out some commonly-agreed principles to be adhered to in progressing the agenda, and a final challenge to all reading this report to take action on the ideas it raises.

1. The agenda

1.1 The respect gap

The key theme of the seminar was how little respect children and young people are given, and the effect of this on children’s services. Children and young people are seen as incompetent in living their own lives, incapable of describing their own experiences and unwilling to work to improve their circumstances. As Emily Card

pointed out, it is particularly ironic, and cruel, that at the very time when ‘citizenship’ has become part of the National Curriculum in schools, and children and young people are taught to be ‘good citizens’ and to appreciate their responsibilities, that the rights which these responsibilities accompany are being one by one taken away.

Emily told the seminar how children and young people in Seaham, County Durham, have been hit with a curfew, meaning they have to be off the streets by 9pm. As Emily said: “The main reason that young people hang around on streets is because they have nowhere else to go.” But this need for fulfilment was not considered by adult planners desiring safe streets and the children and young people’s rights to freedom of movement were curtailed.

In contrast to the Seaham situation, when adults in Peterlee were concerned about children and young people hanging around on the streets, and the children and young people had nothing to do, the young people, with the help of IiC, established ‘Club Idol’ - a weekly disco/nightclub- which they run themselves. It has been a great success, there has been no trouble between the children and young people, and they are off the streets- a striking example of what can be done if children and young people are shown the respect they deserve.

But this respect is not commonplace. Children and young people begin from a position of suspicion. As Jenny Cooke pointed out: “Adults get respect from young people automatically but young people have to earn adults’ respect. There should be mutual respect.” When asked what the one thing she would like to change was, Ashleigh Greathead replied: “If only they would listen to us.”

Thus, I summarise the first crucial point on which all seminar participants are agreed:

Children and young people have a right to be treated with the respect due to any citizen.

1.2 The need for change

The above examples are striking and I am sure that none of us would say that the Seaham curfew was the better solution for dealing with the two similar problems. Thus, we are agreed on the fundamental principles of the agenda. However, being agreed on this is not enough. As Liam Cairns said: “We all know about and genuinely believe in the value of children and young people being involved (in service planning) but we are all systematically defeated by the politics of it.”

The ways that people have tried to tackle the problems affecting children and young people in the past have, in almost all cases, failed. As Peter Kemp readily admitted: “We (at IiC) have failed to achieve more things than we have actually achieved.”

Even internationally-praised projects such as IiC are fighting a losing battle. For every success such as Club Idol they get through, there are ten Seaham curfew-like failures. The successes projects such as IiC manage are against the system, and despite it, not because of it.

As Jenny Cooke commented when asked what practical steps she could take to progress the agenda within the next 12 months: “We (children and young people) have

no power to change anything. If we had the power to change things, we wouldn't be here (at the seminar) today.”

Therefore, the second crucial point on which all seminar participants are agreed:

Many of the methods we have employed to progress the agenda have failed. If it is to be accomplished, we must find new ways of working.

1.3 The need is now

At various points throughout the seminar, IiC was praised for its groundbreaking work, and despite its representatives voicing their concern that even nine years after its establishment its work is still considered ‘on the margins’, they were told that their work would eventually be universally accepted. It was as if they were to be praised and respected as early pioneers of the agenda, but their destiny was to not see it achieved. One delegate commented: “Historically, things are going this way. You will see the benefits in 25 years’ time.”

This is not good enough. For the young people of Seaham, locked in their houses like prisoners at 9pm, the value of our agenda being achieved and children and young people being respected and full members of society in 25 years’ time is none. They are young people now, and deserve to be respected, full members of society, and use public services which recognise them as such, now. As one phrase used by a young person in County Durham, and quoted to the seminar by Peter Kemp went: “I’m not bothered about your grand strategies. I want to change my life where I live it.”

If we are agreed that the agenda is correct, and we are even agreed that slowly government at all levels is moving towards it, why can we not achieve it now? It may seem a simplistic question, but I challenge anyone to come up with a convincing answer.

Thus, the third crucial outcome on which everyone is agreed:

Children and young people are suffering because of services which do not treat them with the respect they deserve every day. Change in the future will not help them. They need change now.

1.4 Our window of opportunity

The previous point may seem daunting. But I make it in such strong terms because of a point which was highlighted constantly during the seminar. And that is, that now is our greatest opportunity to achieve our agenda. As Jason Yiannikou commented: “Now more than ever people in Whitehall need to talk to people receiving services, because they need that credibility.”

Claire Hartley made this point in her presentation to the seminar: ‘The Policy Agenda’. Claire pointed out that because of the Kennedy Report and the Laming Report, children’s services are higher on the political agenda than at any time in living memory. And, even more importantly, the legislation and policy which has arisen from the reports says that children and young people **must** be involved in planning, running, and evaluating the services that affect them.

We must not allow the tragic circumstances surrounding these reports, or the fact that the raising of the profile of children’s service has taken place in a political context, to deter us from achieving our agenda, and making the changes we believe can prevent such events occurring again.

Thus, point four.

Although change and how it can be achieved is daunting, given the political context, this is a fantastic opportunity to realise our agenda, and must not be missed.

1.5 Top priority

We believe in this agenda. We realise we need to change the ways we have been working to achieve it, which have failed. We realise the agenda must be achieved now, because children and young people are suffering while it lies untouched. And we realise that we are lucky to have the opportunity to achieve this agenda now, because of the current political climate. Having accepted these points, my next one is simple.

We must make the achievement of our agenda our first priority.

I realise, as Celia Atherton commented: “we all get a lot of papers across our desk”, but I cannot stress enough that we need to make this happen. Claire Hartley told the seminar how: “I began working on the Children’s National Service Framework. I went away and took another job, came back, and they were still working on it.” This cannot be allowed to continue. So, in Celia’s metaphor, ‘let’s put this one on top of the pile’.

Thus far, I have outlined the basic arguments behind this report and its agenda, attempted to explain the context in which the agenda sits, and concluded that, given the above, the realisation of it must be of utmost importance.

In the second section, I shall move on to looking at several of the challenges and questions raised during the seminar which need to be addressed before the agenda can be progressed.

2. The Big Issues

2.1 What is participation?

The shorthand used for what I have called the ‘respect’ due to children and young people in their public services, and the first point of the agenda, is ‘participation’. As Gerison Lansdown explained to the seminar, the definition of participation is somewhat blurred partly due to its everyday use in a different context. “All children, of course, ‘participate’ in a range of activities in their daily lives,” she said.

“... They take part, for example, in games, conversations, lessons, arguments, religious activities and the arts. However, in the context of their human rights, participation means more than taking part. Taking part in a sporting activity organised by an adult is not participation. Being provided with the space to create a game, decide on respective roles, rules, and focus, is.”

Gerison continued to argue that participation has four key ingredients:

- a) An ongoing process of children’s expression and active involvement in decision making at different levels in matters that concern them
- b) Information sharing and dialogue between children and adults based on mutual respect and sharing
- c) Power for children to shape both the process and outcome
- d) Acknowledgement that children’s evolving capacity, experience and interest play a key role in determining the nature of their participation

Having established this definition as a starting position, the point arises that there are different ‘levels’ of participation. At one extreme children and young people can be merely asked when a decision making process is complete what they think of a service, and, at the other, children and young people can initiate, plan, deliver, manage and evaluate a service.

Gerison identified three broad levels of participation which I believe are useful:

- 1) Consultative processes: in which adults seek out young people’s views and experiences in recognition that they have a valuable contribution to make on matters that affect them. Although limited in scope for real engagement by young people, they do, nevertheless, play a valuable role in incorporating young people’s views into otherwise adult-defined agendas.
- 2) Participatory processes: provide opportunities for young people to be actively involved in the development, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of projects, programmes, research or activities. This level of participation by young people, whilst initiated by adults, does create opportunities for them to share power with adults and to play a significant role in shaping activities in which they are engaged.
- 3) Self-initiated or managed processes: are those in which young people themselves are empowered to take action, and are not merely responding to an adult-defined agenda. In these processes, adults respect young people’s capacities to define their own concerns and priorities as well as the strategies for responding to them. Most importantly, the role of adults is to help create the spaces in which young people can begin to develop their ideas, organise themselves and pursue the activities they have prioritised. The creation of such spaces involves a commitment to creating real partnerships with young people, with adults fulfilling key roles, for example, as advisers, supporters, administrators, fund-raisers and counsellors.

From the identification of these three levels, the question arises: what level should we attach ourselves to, or allow professionally?

I would argue that we should push for the highest possible level of participation of children and young people at all times. This is what young people are entitled to and deserve. As Jenny Cooke commented: “The way things are done is: ‘Here’s what

we've done, what do you think?' It should be us all sitting down as equals, where there is respect and everyone is on equal terms."

Gerison identified five 'points of intervention for participation'. They are:

"Children and young people have **rights**, many of which remain unfulfilled. In seeking their fulfilment, they have a **claim** against those with obligations to act. Parents, communities, civil society organisations, as well as government have **duties** to take action. Action then needs to be taken to define and develop strategies for the **implementation** of that action, as well as **monitoring and evaluating** its impact."

She continued:

"At each of these five points of analysis and action, children and young people clearly have an interest and therefore an entitlement to participate. Accordingly, any strategy for promoting participative programming needs to engage with the potential for involvement at each of them."

And further:

"The (UN) Convention on the Rights of the Child clearly demands that all children capable of expressing a view are entitled to do so. This commitment is reiterated in Article 2 of the Convention, the principle that all rights apply to all children without discrimination."

Therefore, the question of what level of participation is acceptable is out of our hands- it has been decided by international convention.

<p>We must only accept the highest levels of participation, with opportunities for 'intervention' at all five points identified above. The minimum standard, if one must be set, is, effectively, everything.</p>
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2.2 Stats or soundbites?

The second major issue which the seminar encountered was relating the value in progressing the agenda of 'story telling'- the lived experiences of services as told by children and young people- to that of conducting research across large numbers of children and young people to provide hard data and statistical evidence to back up demands for change.

I began to consider the dilemma myself from the position that there is value in both but neither is always correct. The adult political world seems to value only statistical evidence, possibly to allow itself to argue that any decision it makes will benefit a large number or even a majority of people, and sections of the media seem to value only personal stories of hardship, which they can vaguely infer apply broadly across society when that may not be the case. Neither, in my view, seemed entirely correct.

During the seminar, we were also presented with the value of both. Ashleigh Greathead deeply affected all delegates with her experiences of school buses. Ashleigh told the seminar how she had to pay to get the bus to school but, if she had lived just an extra half mile away, would have been provided with a taxi to and from school, free of charge.

On the other hand, Jenny Cooke's research into the non-existence of a 'right to education' for children and young people (see later in this report) was equally effective. One of IiC's biggest victories to date, the creation of the IiC travel card which allows 14-16 year olds half-price travel on buses in County Durham, only came about following extensive research by the team of young people involved, and once they had proved statistically the benefits of such a scheme.

In this debate, I believe the strategies adopted by both of the seminar's commissioning agencies have much to teach us. RiP is dedicated to the use of research and shared practice to producing better outcomes. It believes research is absolutely necessary. The same can be said for IiC. Its catalogue of reports, and number of groups of young people even now researching issues is evidence that it believes in this approach. But the significant point here is that this approach need not reduce issues to mere statistics. Human stories can still be incorporated and used as evidence of the need for change.

The value in this approach can further be seen from comments made by Jonathan Bradshaw following the seminar, that, in his view, if his work incorporated more personal stories- to support the statistics he has traditionally worked with- it would be much more effective.

Thus, the seminar's conclusion on this issue is:

Both statistical research and human stories are valuable tools in proving the need for change. We should use both to achieve the agenda.

2.3 'Built in, not bolted on'

As a group, seminar participants were already convinced of the correctness of the agenda. As Liam Cairns put it, "We know about and genuinely believe in the value of children being involved". However, the agenda has not been accepted widely. Thus, as Gerison Lansdown put it: "The real challenge is to institutionalise participation- to move beyond participation in projects and initiatives, towards widespread recognition that children and young people are entitled to be heard and respected in all spheres of their lives- at home, in school, in local communities, in the political sphere."

IiC and projects like it have made notable progress in forwarding the agenda, and have successes to show for their work. But, as Liam Cairns and Peter Kemp commented in their presentation to the seminar: "Ours is still very much a minority view. Mainstream public policy continues to be effectively the exclusive preserve of professional adults."

It was the general belief of the seminar that to take the agenda forward from where it currently stands, participation cannot be 'shelved off' to initiatives such as IiC. It must become part of the thought processes of every civil servant dealing with children's services. Individual 'champions' can no longer carry the fight: everyone must play their part. As Jenny Cooke noted: "The first thing is dialogue and the second is engaging young people at the heart of the process. Young people need to be built in rather than bolted on."

The agenda agreed must become part of mainstream service planning- it can no longer be an afterthought or minority view.

2.4 Getting into the mainstream

The challenge comes in how to establish the agenda in that mainstream. And it occurred to me that there are two ways of achieving this: by being within existing adult-designed structures and working for change from the 'inside', or to stand away from the existing structures, and demand change from the 'outside'.

And the seminar's solution to this is that again, the cause is only knocked back if absolute statements are made on such wide-ranging questions- there is value in adopting both approaches at different times.

The essential question which must be asked to determine whether existing structures should be accepted or a fresh break should be attempted, is not simply one of preference, but one of practicality. We need to ask ourselves: is this structure working? And, more importantly, the children and young people receiving the services need to be asked if it is working. If it is, it would seem reasonable to work 'inside'. If it is not, change may need to come from 'outside'.

The question here is not one of the means, it is the outcome- the achievement of our agenda, and the means should only be an issue if it contradicts the agenda.

The choice of working inside or outside existing structures should depend on whether they are working- which only children and young people can tell.

3. Education, Education.... What to do with education?

Up to this point in this report, I have not singled out any particular service or policy that needs changing if our agenda is to be achieved. I believe it would have been incorrect and hypocritical of me to do so, having argued that the momentum for whatever changes are made needs to come from the children and young people who experience the service.

However, during the course of the seminar, the issue of a young person's right to education kept coming back up for discussion. Jenny Cooke told the seminar that in current UK law, a child has no right to education- rather a parent has the right to have their children educated. Jenny suggested this makes it easy for schools to dismiss the complaints, observations and rights to participation of children and young people.

She continued:

“The use of uniform and general atmosphere of schools means that young people can lose their sense of individuality and when they try to express this individuality they are named 'rebellious' or 'rowdy'.

Every year the government, local government and individual schools are set targets in exam results that they **must** achieve. Teachers and pupils are put under pressure as schools receive financial benefits for reaching the targets. However, fundamental principles of learning and gaining knowledge are lost. Students are taught enough to pass exams and there is never room to explore subjects of interest.”

Whether we should fight for a change in the law to grant children and young people the right to education was debated at length. Below I list several comments by various delegates that made important points about our education system:

Celia Atherton: “If Ofsted spoke to young people in schools they would take 1/20th of the time they do. I’m amazed by how astutely children are kept out of the evaluation process.”

Gerison Lansdown, when asked what one thing she would like to change about how children and young people are treated: “Throw every school out and start again. The way children learn is not the way we teach them in schools.”

Debbie Jones, when asked the same question: “Make education a right for children and young people.”

Anonymous: Ofsted should use the standards applied to adult services to evaluate schools

Peter Kemp: Is making education a right going to improve the experience of school for young people?

This final comment by Peter is, I believe, crucial. Jenny Cooke brought up the fact that children and young people do not have a right to education to offer a possible explanation as to why, in her words, “it is easy for schools to treat children how they want, with poor school meals, appalling toilets and intimidating behaviour by teachers.” In my opinion, this is again a question of means and ends. What we need to do is enable children and young people to change the situation they want to change- in this case to improve school meals and toilets, and stop teachers intimidating students. If making education a right of children and young people will achieve these goals, fine. If it will make no difference, it is just another badly-planned policy to throw on the pile with the rest- and there are plenty there already.

4. Reconstructing the action plan

As I said in my initial thoughts, the seminar failed in its stated goal of producing a detailed action plan for the forwarding of the participants’ agenda. Individual participants made stand-alone commitments during the seminar, and have since contacted me providing evidence that these thoughts have resulted in positive action. A larger action plan, however, does not exist.

Despite this, as I said, I believe it was possible, useful, and necessary for me to co-ordinate the thoughts of participants into an action plan which all seminar participants have agreed to after the event.

This re-constructed action plan calls on all seminar participants, and other readers of this report to:

- Ensure that in your area of work, children and young people are treated with the respect they deserve as citizens
- Be ready to admit that methods of achieving our agenda have failed, and to work in new ways to do so
- Remember that children and young people need our agenda to be achieved now and press towards this happening

- Be aware that the current political context provides opportunities for the agenda to be realised, and be ready to take advantage of these
- Realise and argue that children and young people deserve the highest levels of participation and work to ensure these become standard
- Be open to using different methods and types of evidence of the need for change and the correctness of our agenda- including both research evidence and lived experiences
- Work to mainstream our agenda, as that is the only way in which it can be achieved
- Focus on the agenda's aims, and ask how these can be best achieved, to inform your strategy in achieving them

One conclusion reached at the seminar was that whereas action needs to be local, people working at a local level need support in what they are doing from central government. Their work and efforts to forward the agenda need to be formally recognised and encouraged by central government.

Participants agreed that the best way to achieve this was for a seminar to be set up, with the backing of central government, which endorses the participants' agenda, and the proposals of this report.

It is to this end that the final point of the action plan calls on the seminar's key participants- Investing in Children, Research in Practice, the Department of Health, and the Department for Education and Skills- to:

- Work together to plan and run a wider-ranging, larger scale seminar where key service-providing agencies can be challenged to adopt our agenda and above action plan

I therefore challenge all seminar participants to communicate with each other and the seminar's commissioners and work together to make this seminar happens **within the next 12 months**.

And I challenge all reading this report, to act upon it. If you have agreed with what you have read, please contact the commissioning agencies and get involved in our work.

Before the seminar failed to produce an action plan, it had been suggested that delegates reconvene in 12 months' time to assess what progress had been made on its agenda. If a government-backed seminar as described in the above occurs within the next 12 months, I see no need for the original seminar to reconvene until a later date than that- possibly 18 months ahead. However, if the above suggested seminar does not occur, I strongly urge the commissioning agencies to reconvene our seminar, as suggested, 12 months hence to assess why such progress has not been made.
