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The Education for Global Citizenship Unit

Evaluation of the Children's Parliament

Final Report
February 2007

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Acknowledgement

The research team would like to thank all participants who agreed to contribute to the evaluation research.

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1. Executive summary

- 1.1. This report was commissioned by the Children’s Parliament (hereafter denoted as CP) to evaluate the effectiveness of CP in achieving its core aim, which is “to provide sustainable and meaningful opportunities for children of 14 and under to engage in local, national and international democratic processes”.¹
- 1.2. The evaluation research, conducted by the Education for Global Citizenship Unit (EGCU) at the University of Glasgow, found that the CP has developed, and delivers, a very high quality and unique model of participative education, based on innovative use of the creative arts, that has a significant positive impact on the young people with whom it engages. CP deals with a very diverse client group in ways that emphasise equality of opportunity, justice, fairness, respect, rights and responsibilities.
- 1.3. In dealing with these themes and values, it is the Evaluation Team’s view that CP provides a framework that is relevant to a range of current national policy priorities and statutory frameworks relating to education, family, community, health, and young people (see point 1.7 and Section 3 for more details).
- 1.4. Furthermore, there is clear evidence that the work of the CP is grounded in an evidence-based and scholarly approach, which is reflected in CP staff’s own research work, including reports to SEED on the Wee Democracy Project (Children’s Parliament, 2005), and to the Scottish Children’s Commissioner.²
- 1.5. The learning experiences, and the outputs and consequences associated with them, which CP offers are of such a high standard that they deserve to be undertaken by larger numbers of young people in Scotland. Indeed the widest possible benefits would accrue if a critical mass of young people could be reached in this way, thus creating an impact beyond the relatively localised model that can be supported at present. As one member of the evaluation team noted while observing the CP in action,

“This is the sort of curriculum that schools should offer. Learning is taking place; it is inclusive, exciting and motivating. There is not a single reluctant learner.”
- 1.6. The single greatest barrier to the expansion of this model is the sustainability of core CP funding. The CP should proceed to develop carefully costed bids for further core support while at the same time undertaking systematic business planning that can map out parallel pathways of income growth and expanded yet sustainable and quality-controlled provision.

¹ http://www.childrensparliament.org.uk/a_inbrief.html accessed 8.6.06

² Reports available from The Children’s Parliament.

- 1.7. Local Authorities should be encouraged to adopt the CP ‘package’, which provides a comprehensive and systematic approach to participative citizenship work with young people, in line with national policy expectations such as the four Capacities of A Curriculum for Excellence, the National Priorities, and Education for Citizenship, as well as initiatives relating to inclusion, personal and social development, and support for learning.
- 1.8. Evidence gathered during the evaluation strongly suggests that the Children’s Parliament is held in very high esteem by those who are familiar with its activities. CP is regarded as excellent with regard to its underlying values and philosophy; to the planning, development and conduct of its activities with young people; and to the commitment and quality of both core and associated staff. In many of these respects, CP provides a unique and innovative model of working with young people.
- 1.9. The methodology that informed these findings included observations of CP in action in two geographically and culturally distinct locations in Scotland, with two different groups of young people; telephone interviews with a number of trustees, associates and Ambassadors for Children working with CP; a policy review; a wide-ranging interview with the two core personnel at CP; and a focus group interview with children who have been involved in one of the projects.

2. Introduction

- 2.1. The Education for Global Citizenship Unit (EGCU) was invited in May 2006 by CP to evaluate and report on its activities, measured against its declared aims.
- 2.2. The research team gathered a range of evidence for the evaluation including a review of relevant policy and research documentation, and qualitative data from a number of sources (see section 3 below on Methodology for more detail).
- 2.3. The evaluation has established a number of key conclusions and recommendations. These are described in section 5, and they will help to underpin the development of a Business Plan for the Children's Parliament.

3. Situating the Children’s Parliament in Context

3.1. Introduction

This section of the report provides a summary of the main findings from a survey of legislation and policy relating to the Children’s Parliament. The aim of this review was to situate the activities of the Children’s Parliament in relation to relevant documentation (policy and research) regarding young people’s participation in democratic processes and educational settings, with a particular focus on the Scottish context. This would thus contribute to the wider process of evaluation.

In addition a range of websites were consulted including the Scottish Parliament (site searched for Children’s Parliament), Youth Scotland and Young Scot. A full list of the websites consulted is provided in Appendix 1.

The aim of the Children’s Parliament, as outlined on the Children’s Parliament website, is

1. ‘to provide sustainable and meaningful opportunities for children of 14 and under to engage in local, national and democratic processes’ (Children’s Parliament, 2006).

Interrelated aims described are

2. ‘to allow children to develop their self confidence, self awareness and self esteem and to create opportunities for them to meet and give their views on what matters to them and what is happening in the world around them.’

3. ‘to develop and run specific projects and events that demonstrate ways in which the rights of the child, as enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, can be practically implemented.’

4. ‘to encourage opportunities for children to participate in local, national and international forums and decision making processes.’

5. ‘to help adults understand the meaning of children’s rights and citizenship and enable them to deliver them in their everyday lives and professional practice.’

These 5 aims provide a useful framework that will be mapped against the most relevant legislation and policies below.

3.2. Young People’s Participation – Policy Focus

The Legislative Framework

The CP’s aims are consistent with a range of laws in Scotland. A commitment to engaging children and young people in democratic processes has been a feature and commitment of the Scottish Executive since devolved government was introduced in 1999. A child is defined as any person under the age of 18 years (Scottish Parliament 2001; 2002).

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child is incorporated in a number of Acts in Scotland, including *The Standards in Scotland's Schools etc., Act 2000* and the *Children (Scotland) Act 1995* (which predates devolution). Article 12 - respect for the views of the child – states that “when adults are making decisions that affect children, children have the right to say what they think should happen and have their opinions taken into account”. (CP Aim 1, 2, 3, 4)

Article 29 of the convention calls for the development of the child’s personality and talent; thus, *The Standards in Scotland's Schools etc. Act 2000* stated that it is the right of every child of school age to be provided with school education and that “it shall be the duty of the authority to secure that the education is directed to the development of the personality, talents and mental and physical abilities of the child or young person to their fullest potential”³. (CP Aim 2, 5)

The same Act also affirmed that: “... an education authority shall have due regard, so far as is reasonably practicable, to the views (if there is a wish to express them) of the child or young person in decisions that significantly affect that child or young person, taking account of the child or young person's age and maturity”. (CP Aim 1, 2)

This complements the *Children (Scotland) Act 1995* which stated that a parent has the responsibility “to safeguard and promote the child's health, development and welfare.”, and indeed, *The Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Act 2006* has sought, amongst other objectives, to make further provision “for the involvement of parents in their children's education and in school education generally”.⁴ (CP Aim 5)

This legislative framework is reflected in, and is congruent with, the policy framework relating to education and young people more generally in Scotland. It is also consistent with the aims of the CP.

The Policy Framework

In 2000, Learning and Teaching Scotland (LTS) published *Education for Citizenship: A Paper for Discussion and Consultation* (LTS, 2000), which describes the nature, importance and aims of Education for Citizenship in Scotland and some of the characteristics of effective practice, two of which are “pupil participation in decision making” and “school-community links” (CP Aim 1, 4). In 2002, *Education for Citizenship: A Paper for Discussion and Development* (LTS, 2002) was published. This was a revised and updated version of the 2000 Paper that incorporated a strong commitment to notions of community and to the idea of participation:

“It also includes the more general notion that citizenship embraces a range of participatory activities, not all overtly political, that affect the welfare of communities. Examples are, voluntary work, personal engagement in local concerns such as neighbourhood watch schemes or parent–teacher associations, or general engagement in civic society.”

(CP Aim 1, 2, 3, 4)

³ (<http://www.hmso.gov.uk/legislation/scotland/acts2000/20000006.htm>, last accessed 9/02/07)

⁴ (http://www.opsi.gov.uk/legislation/scotland/acts2006/asp_20060008_en.pdf, last accessed 9/02/07)

The methodologies used by the CP support this but also resonate with:

“The ability to integrate thoughts, ideas and experiences is at the heart of effective and purposeful citizenship. Young people need to see, and learn to make use of, connections between:

- *knowledge and skills associated with different areas of study*
- *what they learn in formal settings and their experiences in the wider world*
- *acting locally and thinking globally.*

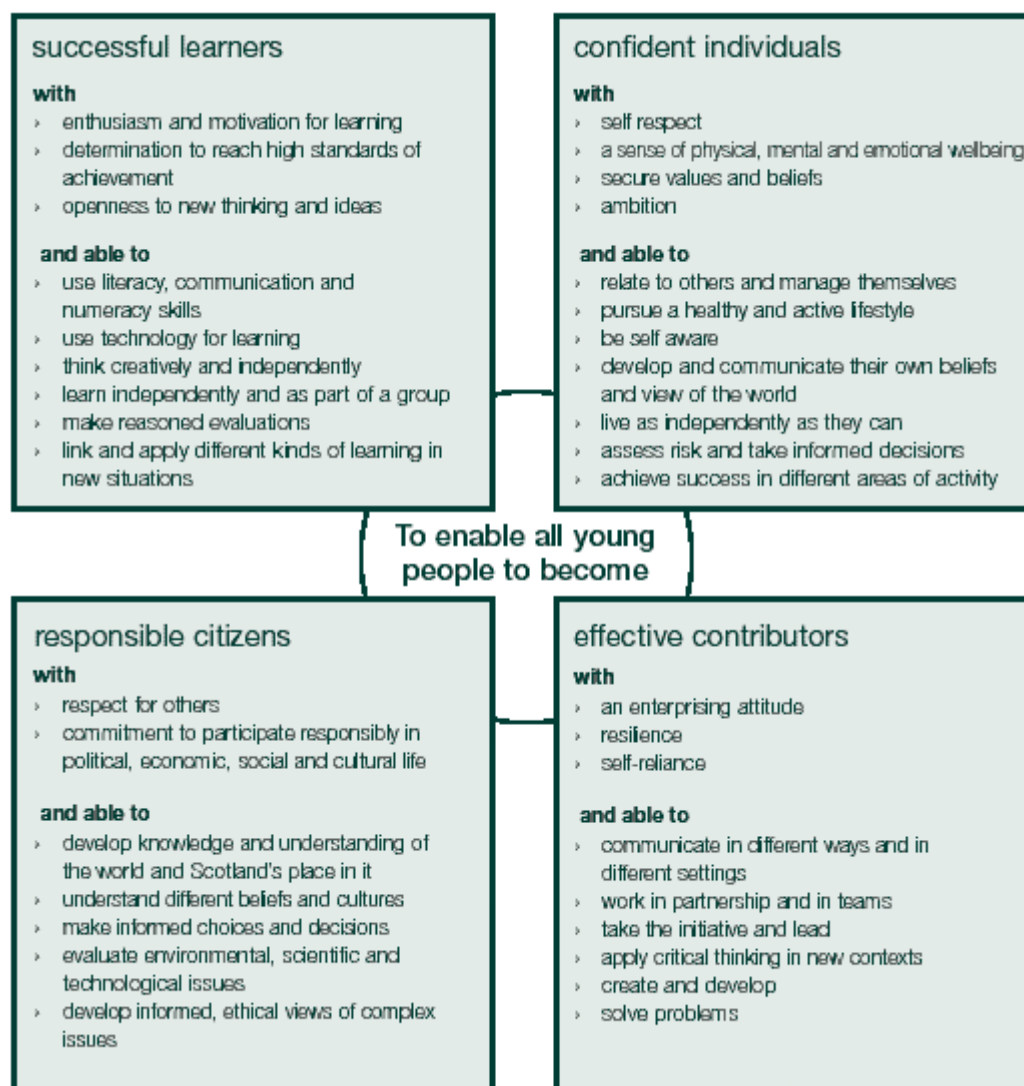
Similarly, the CP’s work reflects the National Priorities in Scottish Education, approved by the Scottish Parliament in December 2000. National Priority Four is *“To work with parents to teach pupils respect for self and one another and their interdependence with other members of their neighbourhood and society and teach them the duties and responsibilities of citizenship in a democratic society.”* (HMIE, 2000).

The *National Priorities* provide schools and local authorities with the five underpinning themes of effective education, and are illustrated by a series of supporting self-evaluation indicators, notably in *How Good Is Our School (HGIOS): Citizenship*. This document provides a helpful summary of the main goals and objectives of the Education for Citizenship agenda in Scotland. These include learning:

- *through a range of cross-curricular and extracurricular activities; and*
- *by encouraging young people to live as active citizens.*

More recently, *A Curriculum for Excellence* has provided an updated rationale for the 3 to 18 Curriculum that recognizes the central role of Education for Citizenship. Citizenship is presented as one of the four core purposes of the curriculum, and significant elements of citizenship permeate the other three. This is illustrated in Figure 1 below, and many connections can be clear between this framework and the work of the CP.

Figure 1: The Purposes of the Curriculum, *A Curriculum for Excellence* (2004)



Any one of a number of other policy documents reinforces the rationale and working practices of the Children’s Parliament. *Ambitious, Excellent Schools* (2004) offers, “Professional freedom ... to tailor learning to the needs of individual young people”. Similarly, the *Assessment is for Learning* programme advocates that pupils be fully involved in planning, reflecting on and evaluating their own learning. *Determined to Succeed* promotes “creative team working and confident young people” and hopes to encourage the energy, enthusiasm and creativity of young people and adults. It also makes claims about “changing the way we deliver education, by introducing enterprising approaches to learning and teaching”. These are consistent with the CP’s approach. Similarly, *Health Promoting Schools* has set schools in Scotland the challenge of “promoting the physical, social, spiritual, mental and emotional well-being of all pupils and staff”. This emphasis on well-being is evident in a number of areas of CP’s work.

A significant aspect of the Scottish Executive's policy on child, family and social inclusion can be located within the Sure Start Scotland initiative which recognizes that "the child develops within the family, with the wellbeing and broad skills of parents fundamental to a child's progress". The aims of this policy not only include the improvement of children's social and emotional development, their health and their ability to learn but also have a key objective of strengthening families and communities.⁵ Again, much of the CP's work acknowledges the role of family and community and the place of the child within this framework.

3.3. Children's Participation and Citizenship Literature

Research and evaluations from international initiatives to facilitate children's participation suggest that the graduated, confidence building and awareness raising approach adopted by the CP is appropriate. The benefits of children's participation are seen in enabling children to 'democratically engage as citizens with their communities and societies, leads to better decisions and services for children; can enhance children's skills and self esteem and better protects children' (Brady, 2006:2).

Rudduck (2003) suggests that young people's participation and citizenship overlap in certain key features:

- supporting active, rather than passive, involvement
- supporting informed thought and action, rather than simply reactive compliance
- supporting the analytic understanding of the structures and rules of institutions which pupils are members of
- supporting a reasoned balance between rights and responsibilities
- taking into account the views of others on social issues
- enabling younger and older pupils to be able to make a contribution to the well-being of their community and providing opportunities for them to do so
- respecting the right of the individual to express a seriously held view on matters that affect him or her.

While Rudduck is describing the particular context of the school in relation to young people's voice, a similar conceptual approach underpins the CP, as reflected in their Report to SEED *on the 'wee democracy project'*,

In our research it will be important to consider the prevailing attitudes and perceptions adults have toward the notion of childhood and how these influence beliefs in children's competence to make informed decisions, act responsibly and exercise their rights. If, in general, adults do not believe that children have the aptitude to engage in morally and socially responsible acts then it is unlikely that they are in a position to take children seriously as individuals who should be listened to, respected and given the opportunity to participate in the decisions that affect them (*Wee Democracy Report*, 2005:12).

⁵ (<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/People/Young-People/children-families/15939/3897>, last accessed 8/02/07)

In her article on 'Developing Children's Participation: Lessons from a Participatory IT Project' Brady (2006) notes that 'there is no one perfect model of participation and what is appropriate will vary from case to case'. She also notes that 'Some of the criticisms of participative approaches are that they are not representative, that models based on adult democratic principles risk replicating their disempowering aspects and that they will prove most attractive to the most confident and articulate young people. (Brady, 2006:3). Brady evaluated the participative approach adopted for the IT project, and concluded that it was in line with the guidelines for engaging children in participatory approaches (Brady, 2006:6). Citing Lansdowne (2001) she notes that a key criterion for genuine participatory work is its relevance to children's lives and link to everyday experience (Brady, 2006:6). In the case of the IT project, the experience of the project had been that 'it is useful to start small and encourage participation well, rather than attempting too much before the organization has a well developed awareness, understanding and competence in relation to participation (Brady, 2006:11).

There are several relevant points raised by this article that are consistent with the approach favoured by the CP, notably awareness that models tailored to adults' understanding of democratic principles may not be empowering and democratic for children; the need for relevance and links to everyday experience and the validity of a small scale approach to build experience and expertise.

Tisdall and Davis (2004) explore the issues associated with children's participation in 'Making a Difference? Bringing Children's and Young People's Views into Policy - Making.' Relevant to the approach favoured by the CP, Tisdall and Davis observe that

According to Davis (2002), many participatory projects fail to achieve tangible outcomes because they are selective in the types of children they allow to participate, do not enable children to adopt decision-making positions within the project, and do not create long term dialogue between policy makers and children. A frequent criticism is tokenistic consultation, where children and young people are asked for their views but never receive feedback and never know if their views had produced any change in policy or practice (Tisdall and Davis, 2004:132).

The need for a child centred focus and approach is recognised by Stafford *et al* (2003). In an article entitled 'Having a say: children and young people talk about consultation', the authors note that 'research in this area can in the main be said to have been motivated by adult agenda, with little attempt to seek the views of children and young people themselves (Stafford *et al*, 2003:361)

The literature relating to children's participation is expanding and there are several publications of relevance such Van Beers (2002), *Children's Participation Experiences in Capacity Building and Training* and Hart (1992) *Children's Participation: from tokenism to citizenship*. The model and approach favoured by the Scottish CP appears consistent with the principles for children's participation in the general literature.

3.4 The Children's Parliament online

It was the Evaluation Team's view that any review of the Children's Parliament (CP) ought to consider its on-line presence, including the website, as this will act as many 'outsiders' first point of contact with the organisation. This is easily navigable and presents essential information relating to the CP. Aims, roles and activities are immediately apparent, with additional information, such as the Report on the first national meeting, available in PDF format.

Development of the CP website has been constrained by limited funding and resources and while its on-line presence, via its website, might appear to be relatively modest, the website succeeds in offering a general introduction to the CP and essential information relating to it. Further funding would enable more extensive development, for example, providing links to other children's organisations, agencies and initiatives.

3.5 Conclusions from the literature review

At the beginning of this literature review, the five core and complementary aims of the CP were listed. The key relevant legislation and policy were then examined against these aims. In applying them in this manner it became evident that CP aims are consistent with the wider legislative and policy domain. Furthermore CP aims and operations demonstrate both research-informed practices as well as practice shaped by their own research. As the next section will demonstrate, the underpinning rationale for the CP translates into effective practice that is true to this wider context, and indeed represents some of the most innovative and leading edge practice in this field.

All of this suggests that local authorities and others seeking to develop participative strategies and programmes for children and young people might wish to consider 'buying in' to the CP package (outlined in Appendix 4) as a means to achieving consistency with both legislation and policy.

4. Findings from observations, participant feedback and interviews

4.1 Two CP sessions were attended by EGCU staff. The intention was to obtain an unstructured and ‘impressionistic’ view of CP in action. This was a crucial element of the evaluation because, as several interviewees noted elsewhere, ‘you have to see the Children’s Parliament in action in order to appreciate it’⁶.

4.2 The first observed CP session took place on the island of North Uist in the Western Isles on the 17th June 2006. The session was entitled ‘Mission Scolpaig’, and ran for approximately 5 hours. The event was presented to the children as a ‘crisis’ scenario in which the children would have to work together in small teams (Healers, Warriors, Inventors and Cooks) to develop sustainable means for their survival and success as a community. The mission was ‘To save the beautiful world you are in’. Warm-up and ice breaking activities, including ‘circle time’ were used to prime the participants for the event. There were significant levels of participation from the majority of children from the outset. For example 8 out of 15 made verbal contributions during the ‘circle time’ activity. One girl noted that they would have been unable to ‘sit round like this at the start of the project’.

4.3 Once the group moved outdoors they were able to explore their environment, looking for objects and natural resources. This session took place in appalling weather, yet many positive features were noted by the observer: teamwork, enthusiasm, imagination, involvement, a sense of community, perseverance, responsible behaviour and good manners. The activity/set-up was described as ‘brilliant’ by the observer, who also praised the support offered by the adult facilitators. On returning to the indoor venue for the event, the children were evidently well-motivated and involved in decision-making. Again, the facilitators provided praise, appropriate structure and excellent resources to support the children’s presentations. The observer noted that the facilitators represented a very broad and interesting mix of backgrounds and expertise, which clearly contributed to the quality of the experience.

4.4 The observer took the opportunity to speak to a number of Ambassadors, supporters and facilitators after the event and certain themes emerged: firstly, that everyone he spoke to was very positive about the CP and its work⁷. Secondly, that the position with regard to levels of local authority support appeared variable, with strong support from the local Health Board but only limited recognition by other local agencies. Thirdly, local adult volunteers felt that they have witnessed positive changes in at least three of the participants in that they have become ‘accepted’ in ways that were not evident prior to their involvement with CP.

⁶ Transcribed from telephone interviews conducted with trustees and associates, September 2006.

⁷ The observer noted in a personal aside/observation at this point that “This is the sort of curriculum that schools should offer. Learning is taking place; it is inclusive, exciting and motivating. There is not a single reluctant learner.”

4.5 The observer noted that the section on the CP website aimed at children⁸ listed certain descriptors of what the Parliament is about (namely who we are; where we live; freedom; health and happiness; feeling safe and being cared for; and having our say). He discussed these goals with a number of participants and they indicated that they felt that they were engaged in several of these ways, notably in relation to ‘having your say’, and in other inter-related ways, such as meeting other children which is not always easy in a dispersed community; the diversity (gender, ability, background) of the selected group of participants; and sharing views with ‘adults who matter’ and ‘helping to be heard’ although at least one participant suggested that while this was evident at a local level, it was perhaps less so at national and international levels.

4.6 The second CP session observed took place at Culzean Castle, South Ayrshire on the 27th June 2006. The basic scenario played out with the group of young people was similar to that in North Uist described above, albeit in a different setting and natural environment. The afternoon session only was observed, during which 20-25 pupils, separated into four groups of Inventors; Bards and Artists; Warriors; Cooks and Healers, worked with 6 facilitators to create ideas, inventions, poetry, rap, resources and songs, drawing from found objects, facilitator expertise and a range of information sources. There were several noteworthy features; the very positive, supportive and concerned relationship between the adults and children; the emphasis on co-operative, and active learning; and the relatively low ‘staff: student’ ratio (of about 1:5). It was also clear that the group of participants had developed into a tightly-knit community- there was genuine sadness at the news that one of the children was moving out of the area (and thus leaving the group). However this departure was marked with speeches, thanks, and a gift from the group. This reinforced the very strong impression of the impact that CP has on what would otherwise be a disparate and disconnected group of individuals.

4.7 The two observation visits provided direct evidence of the quality of the core activities of CP. Both observers agreed that what they witnessed was education of a very high quality, predicated on the commitment, expertise and experience of the leaders/facilitators, careful planning and preparation, a carefully thought out methodological and pedagogical approach, and the central role of the creative arts in the undertaking (see additional comment in 5.17 which reinforce the educational impact of the CP’s approach).

4.8 The Children’s Parliament has its own procedures for gaining feedback from participants, their parents or carers, and others. While it would be methodologically invalid for the evaluation to rely on this as a sole evidence base, some findings and conclusions derived from these sources are included in this section, together with independent evidence gathered as part of the evaluation that triangulates and lends credence to these findings.

4.9 Feedback shared with the evaluation team to date has been highly positive. It reinforces the impression from interviews and observations that the core activity of the CP, i.e., working with young people to develop self-confidence, self-esteem and skills of articulation and advocacy, is carried out in a very effective manner. The children suggest that their involvement in CP has made them 'happier', that they understand they have choices available to them in their lives that they were not previously aware of, and that they are glad they were chosen to participate.

4.10 The recurring theme in feedback from parents is that their children have gained significantly in self-confidence, and in some cases this has impacted on their relationship in a positive way. One parent said, 'She has had a great time and she's grown so much more in confidence. It's made me think, made me listen to her and value her opinions more which has been really good for me'. Another parent echoed these comments: 'My daughter found the Children's Parliament very beneficial. She has come out of her shell more and is more likely to question things. She has far more confidence. Over the last year she has become much more responsible'. Others compare the CP methodology and philosophy with conventional school education, noting that CP is a more appropriate and enjoyable style for their children.

4.11 Comments around growing confidence among the young participants also emerged in the feedback from the 'Ambassadors' - volunteer helpers who assist in the planning and delivery of the CP's activities at a local level.

4.12 Feedback from a specific project, the South Ayrshire exhibition, came mainly from parents and highlighted the quality and the creativity of the children's work, as well as noting the commitment of both children and helpers to quality work.

4.13 The focus group of CP participants raised a number of points that are worth noting here: firstly, all of the children were very positive about their experiences with the CP. They particularly liked the fact that they have met lots of new people, as well as visiting the Scottish Parliament and residential activities. There were no negative comments about any aspect of the CP (although one or two young people said they didn't like the healthy eating choices during sessions!), and by contrast a strong sense emerged of how the CP has boosted their confidence, and helped them to understand more about children's rights and politics in a general sense.

4.14 In particular, evidence emerged of the children's contrasting views of the learning *process* as it takes place in schools, and learning at the CP. The former was characterised by 'sitting at desks', whereas the latter was 'fun', while still clearly understood as learning. One young person indicated that they do occasionally get opportunities for more active learning in school, but 'usually the rest of your class just mucks it up'. The *content* of what they learn is different too. They indicated that they had learned about dealing with issues such as bullying and 'what the world will be like when you grow up' with the CP. They highlighted two equally inaccurate (to their minds) perceptions on the part of their classmates about what they do at the CP:

'Most people in our class think that we sit around tables discussing what's going on in the world....'

Whereas:

'Some of my friends used to think the opposite- that we just had fun.'

This reinforces a theme that emerged elsewhere in the evaluation; i.e. that the 'narrative' of the CP is still not entirely clear to those not directly involved in its operation. Such a positive story deserves to be more assertively related to a wider audience in order to break down some of these preconceptions and misconceptions.

The young people also had some recommendations regarding the future of CP activity and engagement:

'There should be the option to take part through the internet and stuff like that.'

And:

'Places [should be] set up where all young people can choose to go to, instead of being selected to take part.'

The young people thus felt that the change brought about by exposure to the CP ought to be experienced by a wider range of children across Scotland, whether through direct face to face inputs or (at the very least) some kind of online engagement.

4.15 Interview evidence from Trustees provided positive reinforcement of the view that the CP delivers a very high quality experience for participants on its programmes. There was also a strong sense of commitment on the part of Trustees to the conceptual foundations of CP as well as the practical applications of its methodology. There was a sense that what CP is able to deliver is timely, and addresses many of the wider societal and educational concerns around young people's engagement, or lack thereof, in their communities or in the formal educational sector.

4.16 Trustees and Ambassadors indicated that CP is able to engage directly with children and young people, their lives and ‘live’ issues in ways that are not easily achieved in other circumstances. Support was expressed for the democratic and child-driven nature of much of what CP is about. An Ambassador indicated that the CP was ‘Absolutely worthwhile...fantastic’, and noted that most of the children in his area were from primary 6, some had personal difficulties or came from challenging backgrounds, but that the CP ‘raised awareness of children’s rights, active citizenship, and participation through Arts and Drama’. It was also good for ‘self-esteem, confidence-building and team-building’. With regard to national initiatives, it ‘ticked so many boxes’ – eco-schools, A Curriculum for Excellence, health promotion, and so on.

4.17 According to one Network Group representative⁹, it had been ‘life-changing for a lot of our kids’. Some children who had ‘fallen through the net’ were welcomed into the activities and blossomed as a result. Also, it had been very beneficial to those children who had social, intellectual or communicative difficulties. Adults were also empowered. Parents (who previously had played a low key role) came forward and offered their skills and time to the Network. Teachers who joined came to meetings and events as educators (rather than teachers). This ‘freed them’ and they were able to contribute their skills in different ways and develop their understanding of learning, i.e., that it also took place outside the classroom. Indeed, this aspect (learning outside the classroom) gave it more legitimacy.

4.18 Through their involvement with CP, many of the children have had the opportunity to engage with various stakeholders and policy makers, including local councillors, MPs and MSPs, the Deputy Minister for Education, the Scottish Children’s Commissioner (SCCYP), and Directors of Education. SCCYP staff are involved in each of CP’s local groups and children therefore have opportunities to feed comments directly to SCCYP staff on a regular basis.

⁹ Network Groups comprise statutory and voluntary sector agency representatives who work with CP to promote wider impact in particular areas.

5. Conclusions and recommendations

5.1 The Children's Parliament is a very effective small organisation that delivers high quality and innovative educational and participatory experiences for the young people that it works with. It is highly regarded by participants, parents and carers of participants, trustees and associates. Both the underlying philosophy and values, and the planning and delivery of its opportunities for young people are entirely consistent with -indeed set a standard of excellent practice for - major current educational and participatory initiatives in Scotland and elsewhere. It impacts very positively and directly on young people.

5.2 The scope of the Children's Parliament's activities is dictated almost entirely by capacity and available resources and funding. The stated goal of 20 local 'caucuses' or groups has not been achieved because of the limited funding that has been made available to CP. Given the evidence of a strong positive impact on young people, further funding should be sought to enable CP to reach a wider range of Scotland's children. Local Authorities in particular may see the 'package' offered by CP (see Appendix 4) as a cost-effective way in which national and local priorities for the engagement and involvement of young people can be achieved and overtaken.

5.3 Awareness and understanding of the Children's Parliament remains limited across the wider educational and policy community in Scotland. Where such awareness exists, it is at least partly based on misconceptions about the nature of its work and role. The CP Directors are aware that such misconceptions exist and are keen to implement strategies to improve understanding and appreciation of the distinctive nature of its aims and activities, and to seek to remove any confusion between themselves and other organisations, for example, the Scottish Youth Parliament. This awareness-raising work would target both young people and adults.

5.4 CP should be more assertive and self-confident in celebrating its achievements and successes. It provides a model that could be drawn upon in a variety of ways in both the formal and informal education sectors. By its nature, the impact of this model can grow exponentially with the number of young people who become engaged. Such growth is conditional upon additional funding being obtained, and would have significant operational demands on the CP team as presently organised; it would require a shift from a small scale, partially voluntary organisation, towards a full time expanded team, supported by an expanded network of funded outreach workers.

5.5 The CP Directors are cognisant of the possible tension between future growth and quality assurance of CP activities, and while aspects of CP's activities might be regarded as resource intensive and labour intensive, such as travel to remote locations and staff/child ratios during events, there is a strong case to be made that the high quality of interaction and facilitation would suffer were such arrangements to be compromised. However CP may wish to explore alternative or complementary approaches to the 'delivery' of core activities as part of a wider review of capacity and sustainability.

5.6 More generally, CP should review and clarify the interface between those aspects of its work relating to the ‘personal development’ of participants and those aspects relating to the engagement of young people in formal decision-making processes at local, national and international levels. CP is clearly very successful in relation to the former. However with regard to the latter it is not yet clear how involvement in the local groups might feed into national and international decision-making, although again it should be noted that the quality of the CP’s work should not in itself provide a barrier to this step up.

Rather the inhibiting factors appear to relate to access to the appropriate power networks that might address young people’s concerns, as well as perennial issues of resourcing. One positive ongoing relationship that should be fostered and developed further is with the Office of the Scottish Commissioner for Children and Young People (SCCYP)¹⁰, (referred to in point 4.18) as this connection provides access to a range of consultative and policymaking networks that might help to bridge the gap between reflection on issues and positive change for wider groups of young people.

5.7 In any event, there is an urgent need for a sympathetic review of the core funding available to the CP, as when this expires at the end of the current financial year there is no obvious means by which the momentum, innovation and quality of CP’s activities can be sustained. It is the view of the authors of this evaluation that the Children’s Parliament clearly merits further core funding in order to secure a sustainable future.

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February 2006

¹⁰ See: <http://www.sccyp.org.uk/>

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Appendix 1 Websites consulted

Dialogue Youth

<http://www.dialogueyouth.org/> (accessed 12/12/06)

Global Movement for Children – Children’s Parliaments around the World

<http://www.gmfc.org/index.php/gmc6/content/view/full/259> (accessed 12/12/06)

National Children’s Bureau.

<http://www.ncb.org.uk/Page.asp> (accessed 12/12/06)

Scottish Children’s Parliament

<http://www.childrensparliament.org.uk/index.html> (accessed 12/12/06)

Scottish Parliament

<http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/home.htm> (accessed 12/12/06)

Scottish Parliament Cross Party Group

<http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/msp/crossPartyGroups/groups/cpg-child.htm>
(accessed 12/12/06)

Scottish Parliament Information Service

<http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/business/research/index.htm> (accessed 12/12/06)

Scottish Youth Parliament

<http://www.scottishyouthparliament.org.uk/> (accessed 12/12/06)

Young Scot

<http://www.highland.gov.uk/livinghere/youngpeople/youngscot/> (accessed 12/12/06)

Youth link

<http://www.youthlink.co.uk/> (accessed 12/12/06)

Youth Scotland

<http://www.youthscotland.org.uk/> (accessed 12/12/06)

Universal Children’s State

<http://www.childrensstate.net/parliament.php> (accessed 12/12/06)

Appendix 2: Questions to trustees/other associates

**Evaluation by the Education for Global Citizenship Unit,
University of Glasgow**

The Children's Parliament

Telephone Interviews with Trustees and other associates of the CP.

September 2006

Global Citizenship Unit commissioned by the CP to review their progress towards their aims and to explore future sustainability and opportunities.

Protocol: Recording, transcript, anonymity ("Trustee" or "associate"), evaluation report accessible.

Questions

Can you begin by describing your role in relation to the Children's Parliament?

How and when did you first become aware of the Children's Parliament?

If you were to describe the Children's Parliament to an outsider, what features would you highlight?

Have you had an opportunity to see the Children's Parliament in action?
If so, what did you think of it?

Do you think that the CP is an effective vehicle for encouraging young people to participate in decision-making?

What other impacts do you think it is having on the young participants?

Do you think that the Children's Parliament's existence is widely known among the key interest groups and policy makers?

Overall, do you think that the C.P is achieving its aims?

What else, if anything, should it be doing?

Do you think that the CP is sustainable in its present form, or should it seek to expand or contract the scale of its operations?

Is there anything else you would like to add?

**Appendix 3 Evaluation by the Education for Global Citizenship Unit,
University of Glasgow**

The Children's Parliament

Focus Group questions with young people.

December 2006

Questions

Do you remember when you first found out about the Children's Parliament?

If you were to describe the Children's Parliament to an adult/another child, how would you do it?

What has been the best bit of your involvement?

Is there anything that you haven't enjoyed?

In what ways has TCP changed you?

- Attitudes
- Confidence
- Working with other people
- In school?
- With friends and family?

Is it different from the learning that goes on in school? If so, how?

Do you think that more YP should get involved? This would cost more? Trade off against other priorities?

What else, if anything, should they be doing?

Is there anything else you'd like to add?

Appendix 4 The CP package for local authorities

The Local Authority Package entails the development and delivery of the following:

- A Children's Parliament group meeting monthly
- A local cross-professional team of adult Ambassadors who support the children and receive ongoing training and support
- A requirement to work in partnership across sectors through the Network Group
- An approach that can be transferred to other settings
- The opportunity to request additional training and support for specific developments e.g. to meet current objectives and priorities (Curriculum for Excellence, Determine to Succeed, Health Promoting Schools etc.)
- Specific teacher training opportunities
- Support for the development of effective pupil councils
- An effective method of challenging prejudices and stereotypes of children and young people through the presentation of children's art work, achievements etc
- A route into a network of children and adults throughout Scotland working around the same themes with opportunities to share information and gauge opinion from around the country
- Access to current theory and practice on children's rights and the whole area of work around citizenship, emotional intelligence, political literacy etc

Appendix 5 Methodology

The methodology was constructed with the following aims in mind:

- To situate the activities of The Children's Parliament in relation to relevant policy and research documentation regarding young people's participation in democratic processes, with a particular focus on the Scottish context;
- To conduct focus group interviews with the children who participate in CP in order to explore the extent of any impact on their self-confidence, self-awareness and self-esteem.
- To gather additional qualitative data by means of a combination of face-to-face, individual and group interviews and telephone interviews where appropriate with a range of staff associated with CP (including the two Co-Directors, the Outreach workers employed by CP, a sample of the *Ambassadors for Children*); and participants at two CP meetings in the Western Isles and the Lothians.
- To explore the perspectives of other supporters of CP (Trustees, etc.)
- To review the implications of the findings relating to the above for the future development of the Children's Parliament.

The research was carried out in accordance with the ethical guidance procedures that apply to all staff and students in the Faculty of Education undertaking research in their capacity as members of the University of Glasgow.¹¹ Consent forms and plain language statements were issued to participants prior to the two observed events described in Section 5.

Telephone interviews were conducted with trustees, ambassadors, a Head Teacher and a Local Authority Quality Improvement Officer. The questions utilised in these interviews were appended to this report (see Appendix 2), although in some cases the questioning was inevitably more open-ended and responsive. Excerpts from the transcriptions of these interviews will be made available to the CP, although certain sections may be retained for reasons of agreed confidentiality. An extended face to face interview was conducted with the two Directors of CP.

A focus group of young people was interviewed prior to a CP session with one of the local authority groups.

Two sessions of CP in action were observed. In some respects these observations were intended primarily to provide a flavour of the operational realities of CP; however they also highlighted certain issues that are relevant to the critical dimensions of the evaluation exercise itself.

An extensive literature review was undertaken including web searches and review of policy documentation and extant research.

¹¹ See: http://www.gla.ac.uk/faculties/education/research/ethics/ethics_intro.html