



**Childhood Policy Programme:
Considering Children
in Policymaking**

What is the British Academy?

The British Academy is the UK's national academy for the humanities and social sciences. We mobilise these disciplines to understand the world and shape a brighter future.



What is this publication about?

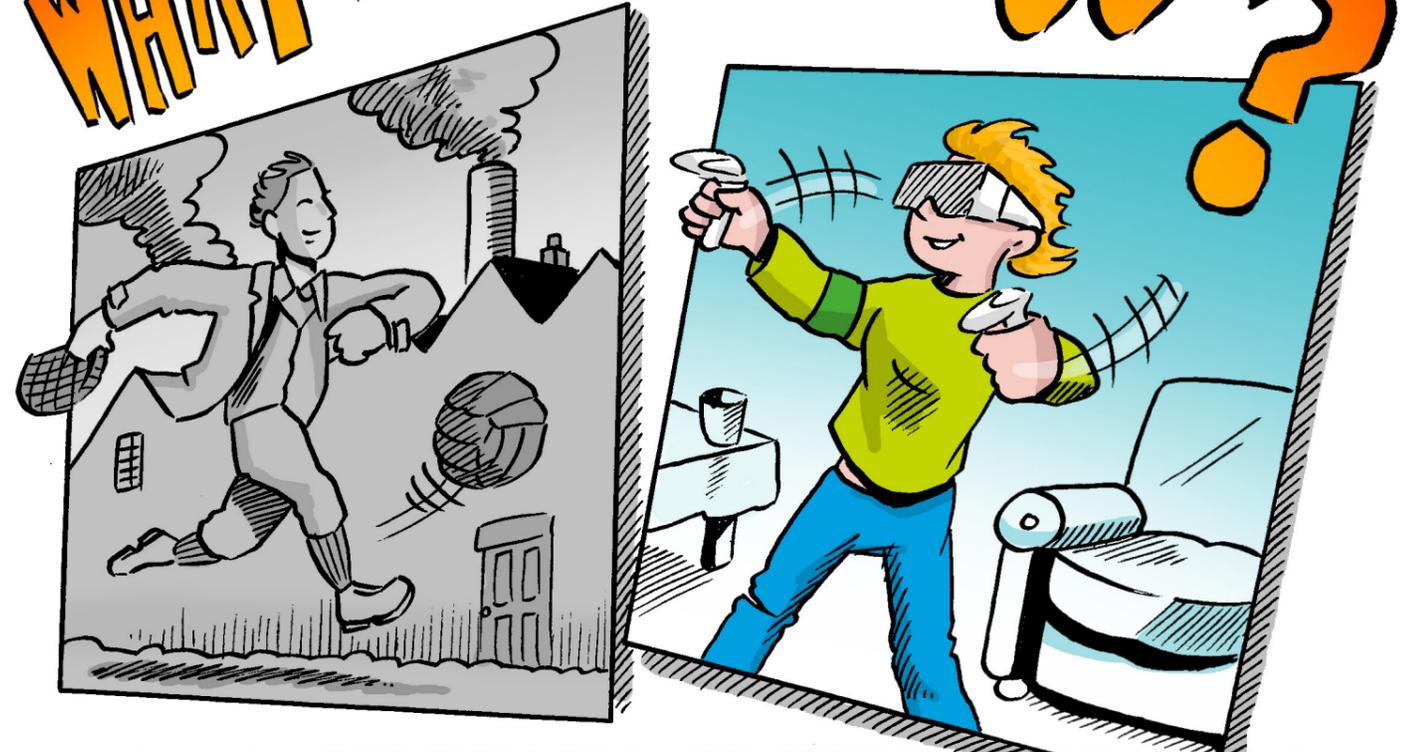
We have been looking at policies to do with children in our 'Childhood Policy Programme'.

The report that this booklet is based upon formed the foundation for the next phase of our work on childhood. All of our work on childhood is available here: <https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/programmes/childhood-policy-programme/>

We are going to cover the following areas in this publication:

- What is childhood?
- How do policymakers consider children's needs when they make policy?
- Are children's and young people's voices heard?

WHAT IS CHILDHOOD?



What is childhood?

This may seem like an easy question to answer. But the idea of what childhood is has changed over time and even today there is no clear idea of when it starts and ends.

What age range does childhood cover?

An example of how it is difficult to determine when childhood starts and ends is the different ages for being considered a responsible person/adult in different aspects of policy:

- In England, you are considered responsible for any crimes once you are 10 years old. Also in England, you must stay in education or training until you are 18 years old, but you are only looked after in care until you are 16 years old.
- You are able to give permission for any medical treatment or withhold consent whatever age you are, as long as you are considered competent. However, this does not extend to other areas, such as education.
- There isn't a single age for starting school across the different parts of the UK.

Childhood is about being a child but it is also a period of development during which a child becomes an adult. Some policies focus on being a child, while others focus on becoming an adult. A balance between these two is needed, so that children get what they need in both the short term and the long term.

During Phase 1, we suggested that there is too much concentration on moving children on to the next stage towards becoming an adult, and not enough on ensuring that children have a happy and rewarding childhood.

Children's rights

We also need to consider children's rights in law.

The UK has signed the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, but it is not UK law as yet. The four parts of the UK (England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland) have different approaches to considering children's rights when they are making policy.

We have suggested that if we considered children's rights as a key part of policies in future, there might be better and more coordinated outcomes for children.

Further discussion needs to be had about how this will happen and who will make sure this happens.

How do policies impact on children?

This is a very complex area. Outcomes for children and young people are reliant on many different factors.

Care policies

We found that these policies seemed uncoordinated and it was difficult to understand, for example, how young people leaving care could easily access Higher Education.

Differences across the UK

There are different approaches in the four parts of the UK. For example, in Northern Ireland the way that Universal Credit (which is money to help families pay their bills) is paid specifically helps families with children.

In Scotland, the 'Getting It Right For Every Child' (GIRFEC) programme is a long-term strategy aimed at giving support to children and young people. It is backed by a law, which means it has more impact.

Other policies that impact on children and young people

Policies which are not specifically about children can still have significant impact on them. For example, policies and laws about pollution, environmental issues, transport, tax and benefits can all affect children's lives. But the impact on children is not always considered during the decision-making process.



How are children being heard?

Sometimes the government will ask children what they think. For example, the 'Every Child Matters' initiative talked to children and young people to find out what mattered to them, rather than making assumptions. Unfortunately, this does not always happen and children's voices are not always taken into consideration.



Children not heard

We found that there was a lack of involvement of children and young people nationally and locally in policymaking. There are School Councils, and Local Authority groups for children in care, but these are at a more local, practical level and there is little involvement in policymaking at all.

Asking children

Further work needs to be undertaken in seeking out children's opinions on what makes them happy, and what they want from life – and people who make policies need to use these opinions in making decisions.



The future

There are things that can be done. For example, Scotland is due to introduce a Strategic Participation Framework, which will hopefully seek children's opinions on a wide range of issues.

The Well-being of Future Generations Act in Wales sets out measures to listen to children and actively involve them in policymaking.



Involving children and young people

Further work needs to take place to explore how to actively involve children and young people in all levels of decision-making and policymaking. Children must be heard and listened to and their views acted upon.

The report that this booklet was based upon formed the basis for the next stage of the British Academy's work on children and childhood.



LOVE,
RESPECT,
HAPPY, SAFE,
SAD, FUN,

For more information, please visit our website at www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/programmes/childhood

We would love to hear any thoughts you have on this booklet, or on our work on childhood more generally. You can contact us at childhood@thebritishacademy.ac.uk



The British Academy
10-11 Carlton House Terrace, London, SW1Y 5AH

Devised and produced by Stoneworks Education Ltd www.stoneworkseducation.co.uk

© Stoneworks Education Limited 2014-2023. All rights reserved.