

A Guide to the Barnardo's Voice and Influence Quality Standards



Introduction



This is an interactive PDF. You can use the tabs on the right to navigate this guide.

At Barnardo's, we believe that children and young people should have opportunities to have their voices heard and be taken seriously in decisions that affect them, and that this leads to better decision-making and improved services.



Our vision is that the voices and lived experiences of children and young people are at the heart of Barnardo's, and they inform how we work and the decisions we make.

We are committed to working in a way that is **safe, ethical, inclusive and meaningful** – these are what we call our non-negotiables. Central to this is making sure we give children and young people the **right support** to get their views across, and for them to feel **seen, heard, and valued**.

Working with children and young people, we have developed **7 Voice and Influence Quality Standards** (referred to as “Quality Standards” throughout the rest of this document) to help make sure that children and young people

consistently have the best possible experience with us – a core ambition of our [Voice and Influence Strategy](#).

By meeting these Quality Standards, this means children and young people:

- **Are well supported to form and express their views.**
- **Are enabled to express themselves in different forms and formats.**
- **Have a consistently good experience working with us.**

Importantly, **our Quality Standards are applicable in all contexts, service types and departments** where children and young people can have their voices heard. This includes the full breadth of Barnardo's services, and diversity of children and young people work with.



About this guide

This guide has been designed to help you to understand each of the Quality Standards in more detail and support you with the steps to take to meet them.

Each section gives examples of evidence that you might use to meet each Quality Standard and includes **quotes from young people**. The tips included are not exhaustive and you may well have other good examples you could use as evidence.

There are also examples of how the Quality Standards map across to policies or other frameworks you may already be working towards and evidencing – meaning you can re-use the evidence you collect in different contexts!



Getting the basics right

For all voice and influence practice, getting the basics in place is an essential starting point. For us at Barnardo's, these take the form of our non-negotiables, which apply to all our work without exception.

We do it safely

Making sure children and young people are **kept safe** and we work in a way which is **trauma-informed and responsive**.

We do it ethically

Making sure how we work is **ethical, fair** and **respectful**, and **informed consent** is obtained.

We do it inclusively

Making sure we ensure **equity of opportunity**, actively **removing barriers** to working with us.

We do it meaningfully

Making sure opportunities we provide are **genuine** and **at the right time**, so children and young people can have a real impact.

If you need help, support or advice on how to demonstrate our non-negotiables in your area of work, contact the Voice and Influence Team who'll be able to help.



Putting it into practice

1. Have a copy of the Quality Standards poster up and visible to children and young people visiting your service – or you could share it at the beginning of their engagement with you.

2. Look ahead to the next period of work, **flagging in advance any events that may need to involve children and young people** – events, conferences, interviews, consultations, to give a few examples. The Quality Standards can help you plan and gather evidence of your approach to safe, ethical, inclusive and meaningful voice and influence practice.

To apply the Quality Standards in practice you could start with:

5. Use the Quality Standards as a reflective tool for supervision or team meetings, to consider what's going well, and what needs strengthening.

3. Implement practical ways for receiving feedback and input from children and young people on an ongoing basis so they can tell you how well you are meeting the Quality Standards – this could be in writing (such as feedback forms or surveys), in conversation (such as a short phone call) or in active co-evaluation processes.

4. Consider how your business as usual might need fine-tuning to more clearly demonstrate the Quality Standards – including ensuring any external contractors you employ are familiar with them.





1 Inform you



Getting the basics right

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2. Safe space for you

3. Support you

4. Include you

5. Relevant to you

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1. Inform you

Be clear and upfront

1a / We give children and young people access to a range of activities, information, resources and support that enable them to express their views.

1b / Children and young people feel well informed, supported, included and more confident to form, express & share their views.

What this Standard means

- Children and young people are given a range of clear, accessible, jargon-free, and 'age or stage' appropriate information and resources to understand how they can have their voices heard and listened to.
- Children and young people should feel well informed about how they can express and share their views in the service or project they are involved in, and know what kind of decisions can be influenced by them expressing their view.
- Children and young people will feel more confident to express and share their views, because they understand what will happen with the views they share and who will have access to the information. They will be reassured that they can ask questions and raise concerns or make complaints should they wish to, without fear of repercussions.



1. Inform you

Be clear and upfront



How to meet this Standard

“Reach out to me and inform me of opportunities to be heard”

- Children and young people are given information in advance about how they can have their voices heard.
- Children and young people are informed that it is their right to express their views and wishes and to be involved in decisions about them.

“Make it visually appealing and don't put too much information on a page”

- Information is child-friendly, relevant, clear and provided in easy to understand and accessible formats.
- Consideration is given to use of images, diagrams, audio, [Widgit](#), video, digital platforms & tools and bilingual text.

“Don't go over the top to be relatable. Don't use words that you wouldn't normally”

- Information is child and young people friendly, written in plain English and care is taken that difficult words or processes are explained simply.

“Read the information out to me, speak slowly and take time to explain what is needed”

- Children and young people are supported to understand information.
- Children and young people are free to ask questions and know how/from whom to get relevant information if they need it.

“Don't rush and give us all the information at once”

- Children and young people are given enough time to take in relevant information.

“Tell us updates on where things are”

- Open and honest conversations take place with children and young people.





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Safe space for you



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2. Safe space for you

Help you feel safe to give your views if you want to

2a / We routinely seek children and young people's views in a safe and ethical manner.

2b / Children and young people feel safe and respected having their voices heard.

What this Standard means

- Children and young people know **they don't have to voice their opinion if they don't want to** – they are offered choice, and adults explain what is and is not possible.
- Adults create a **safe and comfortable space for children and young people** to engage – particular attention should be given to creating safe spaces for those that are less heard in society. (See '[National Education Union- Framework for developing an anti-racist approach](#)' for more guidance).
- Children and young people are **involved in ways that suit their age, capacity and interests**.
- Adults address adult/child power imbalances to ensure **children feel safe and not under any pressure** during the process of having their voices heard.
- Children and young people are given **the opportunity to explore and participate in different forms of engagement** should they wish.





2. Safe space for you

Help you feel safe to give your views if you want to

How to meet this Standard

“Build trust - a few questions for you to get to know me and for me to get to know you”

- Adults offer to have a chat on the phone, text, write, email, use social media, share getting to know you documents or meet face to face to build trust.

“Hold the meetings where young people are comfortable”

- Spaces that are familiar to children and young people are used and an informal atmosphere is created, wherever possible.
- Spaces are provided that consider equal opportunities for all – for example: venues are accessible, and the format of meetings and activities are inclusive.

“Be understanding, use trauma informed practice and don't raise your voice or shout at me”

- Children and young people understand the options available to them to have their say and they also understand that they have the right and choice to not be involved.
- It is made clear from the start of the process how confidentiality and consent will be managed.
- When engaging with children and young people online, they are made aware of who is going to be on the video call so they can decide how they want to participate.

“Don't focus on a person's flaws and what's happened on them”

- Evidence how you celebrate children and young people's achievements and strengths, and recognising their distance travelled.
- Ask for children and young people's ideas about what could improve services and their experience – create opportunities for them to design solutions to problems.

[Continued... >](#)



2. Safe space for you

Help you feel safe to give your views if you want to



How to meet this Standard – continued...

“Be a good listener and try to understand what I am trying to say”

- Check with children and young people that you have understood what they are saying, capture it in their own words, and share it back to them so they can double-check make sure it accurately represents their views.

“Give me enough time to gather my thoughts and feedback to others”

- Plan additional time into activities and use creative methods that produce something physical to act as a prompt to help young people share their views independently.

Other information that might be useful

It could be useful to contact [Barnardo’s Research and Ethics Committee \(BREC\)](#) for their input and feedback about project plans and use the [Service User Insight Checklist](#) to help you consider the steps you should take when planning to gather insight from service users.





3

Support you



Getting the basics right

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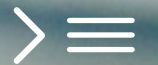
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3. Support you

Let you be in control of how you want to be heard

- 3a /** We confidently facilitate inclusive and meaningful voice and influence work with children and young people.
- 3b /** Children and young people feel well informed, supported, included and confident to form, express and share their views.

What this Standard means

- **Sufficient time, information and materials are provided** and communicated effectively to children and young people to help facilitate their meaningful participation.
- Every child/young person will have their own journey, which needs to be progressed, with support, **at their own pace.**
- Adults are **approachable and responsive** to children and young people, and their methods and approaches are diverse and child and young people friendly.



- Adults create environments in which children and young people feel relaxed and **build their self-esteem and confidence.**





3. Support you

Let you be in control of how you want to be heard

How to meet this Standard

“If I don’t understand, adults should keep trying different ways to help me understand”

- Use different methods to help children and young people understand processes and what they are being asked, taking into account different learning and communication styles.

“Be nice, kind, enthusiastic and understanding”

- All efforts are taken to give children and young people the choice in how they want to be heard.
- Children and young people help decide the platforms and formats that will work best for them – for example, creating a digital story or voice note could work better for some young people, rather than writing.

- Adults are supported to use digital tools and creative methods effectively so that children and young people feel respected, confident and supported.

“Help you out, don’t dismiss or be mean to me when I am thinking and give all participants time to express their views”

- Give children and young people time to think, and ask other professionals to do the same.
- Let the discussion move at the young person’s pace, acknowledging that thinking about things first is important.
- Offer support to think about specific questions or topics and give examples to help.

“They should not tell you ‘no’ to your feelings, no matter what you say”

- Reflect back to children and young people what you have heard them say about their feelings.

“Be available, listen and not try to ignore you if you are sad about what they say and if you get hurt, they should help you talk about it”

- Check in with children and young people regularly to evaluate and review how their engagement mechanisms are working and make adaptations as required.





4

Include you



Getting the basics right

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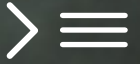
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4. Include you

Treat you fairly, don't judge you and give you an equal opportunity

- 4a /** We respect the unique worth of every individual, and each child and young person is treated as an individual.
- 4b /** Children and young people have equal access to a range of activities, information, resources, and opportunities that support and enable them to express their views – whoever they are, whatever they have been through, and whatever their needs.

What this Standard means

- Respect is shown to the unique worth of every individual – children and young people are not a homogeneous group and **diverse engagement strategies should be used**. Children and young people are not discriminated against for any reason.
- Consideration is given to children and young people's backgrounds, experiences, concerns, vulnerabilities, and existing commitments – **activities must be planned and adapted** around children and young people's varying needs and situations.
- Efforts are made to **meet in places and times which are accessible to children and young people**, especially the most marginalized, taking into account specific requirements.





4. Include you

Treat you fairly, don't judge you and give you an equal opportunity

How to meet this Standard

“Compromise, meet us where we are at and be flexible”

- Information and activities are accessible and varied so they can equally benefit all children and young people including those with additional needs.
- Cultural and religious requirements are respected.
- Create an action plan about the levels of inclusion and belonging for racially minoritised children and young people in your service or project.

“Hold meetings where young people are comfortable and doesn't clash with other commitments”

- Include children and young people in exploring creative options for inclusive engagement.

- Ensure timings of events meet young people's needs and offer alternatives to in person activities to maximize the numbers and variety of young people who take part.

“Don't single us out to meet professionals needs around events like Mental Health Awareness days, Black History Month and Pride Month, but at no other point”

- Consider how to involve children and young people in everyday practice in your setting.

“Be open to young people's views and take that in mind”

- Listen to what young people are telling you is important and create opportunities for them to influence that.

- Children and young people can express their views in confidence without fear of repercussions that would adversely affect the support they receive from Barnardo's.

“Treat all young people's views equally”

- Make sure to get in touch with children and young people from a variety of settings.
- Set up safe spaces for distinct groups of children and young people to share their views.





5 Relevant to you



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5. Relevant to You

Include you in issues about you and that are of interest to you

5a / We actively seek children and young people's views on issues that are relevant and are of interest to them.

5b / Children and young people feel valued for who they are and whatever they contribute, without judgement, worry or fear. They can proudly be their whole selves.

What this Standard means

- Children and young people should be able to give their views on topics and issues which draw upon their own lived experiences, and that are of relevance, interest and importance to them.
- Space should be created to enable children and young people to highlight and address the issues themselves, which are relevant and important to their lives.





5. Relevant to You

Include you in issues about you and that are of interest to you

How to meet this Standard

“Give me the chance to have my opinion on things that matter in my life”

- Children and young people are supported to get involved in opportunities to have their voices heard on matters which are of interest to them.
- Adults should not withhold opportunities for children and young people to have their voices heard in issues that may be of interest and relevance to them, unless there is a valid reason (usually because of safeguarding or health and safety reasons).
- Children’s expectations should be managed effectively so that they understand the scope and relevance of their involvement.

“Give young people a choice on what they can participate in”

- Adequate time and information are provided to children and young people so that they can decide if the opportunity is something they would like to express their opinion on.

“Stay on target”

- Plan activities so that they maximise the time that young people can share views and influence the things that are important to them.

“Respect our opinions and others in meetings and groups”

- Thank and recognise children and young people for their contributions.

- Create group agreements to support everyone involved to be respectful of other’s different opinions and experiences.

“If you are asking me to do something extra, reward me for my time”

- Consider how to recognise and reward children and young people for their time.

Other information that might be useful

For more information and guidance on how to recognise and reward young people, have a read of [our guidance](#) that outlines our approach to this.





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Value you



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6. Value you

Your opinion matters,
we treat you with respect

- 6a /** We convene the right audience for children and young people to communicate their views to.
- 6b /** We are clear about lines of communication and accountability to children and young people.
- 6c /** Children and young people feel respected and feel that their views are being heard by those who can make a difference or enact change.

What this Standard means

- Children and young people are able to express their views without fear of discrimination, and doing so should not put them at risk of harm.
 - Children and young people's views are communicated to the people who can make decisions related to, and in response to, those views.
 - Good open channels of communication are set up so that children and young people can give their views to decision-makers (and there are decision-makers at all levels of Barnardo's!).
 - Adults demonstrate effective listening skills so that children and young people feel respected.
- 
- Professionals are held to account for not listening to or acting on, or for inappropriately commenting on, children and young people's experiences.





6. Value you

Your opinion matters, we treat you with respect

How to meet this Standard

“Treat each young person as an individual and take the time needed to understand their particular circumstances, changing how you respond to them and work with them to take this into account.”

- Children and young people’s other commitments (like work, school or play) and circumstances are taken into account when meeting with decision makers.

“Write down what I say. Go back over what I have said”

- Actions and decisions are recorded accurately, sent back/read back to the young person to check for accuracy and are passed on to people that can make a difference.

“Don’t be dismissive. Respect opinions.”

“Look interested. Pay attention to what I say when I am talking, don’t go on your phone.”

- Adults ask for children and young people’s views and take them into account, accommodate them or explain why something is not possible.
- Adults show how young people’s views have been passed on to those with the power to enact change.

“Adults should NOT put their own opinions when asking young people their opinions”

- Feedback/documents developed by young people are appropriately stored and shared.
- Children and young people’s views are recorded in their own words.
- Children and young people’s comments boxes/anonymous feedback processes are in place.



7

Makes a difference to you



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7. Makes a difference to you

Listen to what you say and tell you what's happened as a result

- 7a /** We embed and evidence children and young people's input in decision-making or actions that we are taking as a result.
- 7b /** Children and young people feel listened to and feel that their views were taken seriously.
- 7c /** Children and young people receive sufficient age-appropriate and timely feedback on the decision/s taken and how their voice influenced it/them.

What this Standard means

- Children and young people are **listened to, taken seriously, and are provided with transparent and honest feedback** about how their views have been heard and have influenced decisions.
- All children and young people have the **opportunity to give their own feedback** about whether they have felt listened to.
- Children and young people's engagement in sharing their views and opinions should be a **positive experience for them and should build young people's confidence**.





7. Makes a difference to you

Listen to what you say and tell you what's happened as a result

How to meet this Standard

“Remember what I said.”

- Results are shared with children and young people in a child-friendly and age-appropriate way that demonstrates that their views and opinions have been taken seriously.

“Follow up on actions and give answers. Give feedback to young people with what they have said.”

- Consideration is given to how the information can be fed back to children and young people e.g. use of ‘You said, we did’ approach.
- Children and young people are asked how they would like to receive feedback (format and platforms) about how their views have been used.

“Don’t tell young people to wait for too long after you have told them something is going to happen.”

- Communication and follow up mechanisms with children and young people are established at the beginning and honoured at the end of the process.
- Feedback is provided in a timely manner to those who have been involved.
- Show how children and young people’s opinions have shaped your work or prompted you to approach something differently.
- Children and young people have access to key stakeholders and have the opportunity to ask questions and provide feedback on their engagement.



Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

Getting the basics right!

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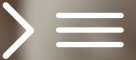
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Who are the Quality Standards relevant for?



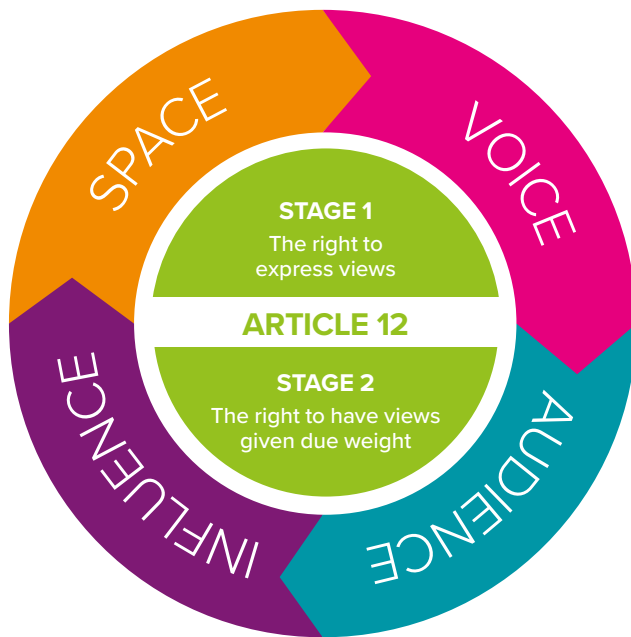
The Quality Standards are relevant and applicable to all children and young people that Barnardo's works with – from 0 to 25, and across all services and departments.

There is no minimum age at which children can be involved in decision-making. Younger children should be offered appropriate support, in line with their evolving capacities, to play an increasingly informed and active role in decisions that affect their lives.

Children aged six and above from a variety of Barnardo's settings have contributed to the development and shaping of the Quality Standards.



How will the Quality Standards work in practice?



The Quality Standards are underpinned by the [Lundy Model of Participation](#), which provides a simple, yet powerful rights-based framework for children and young people's participation.

The Lundy Model underlines the importance of providing **Space, Voice, Audience and Influence** for children and young people to be able to fully claim and exercise their rights under Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The Quality Standards also reflect the UN's [Nine Basic Requirements](#) for implementation of the child's right to be heard. The Quality Standards can therefore be used as a checklist for **all processes in which a child or children are heard and participate.**

The self-assessment (see next FAQ) will also help you gather more detailed evidence of how you meet the Quality Standards – in turn, giving you a sense of what you do well and areas you need to strengthen.

The Voice and Influence Team have developed – and ongoingly develop as need arises – a suite of resources and training to help you assess where you are at with your voice and influence practice. Training sessions include:

- Introduction to Voice and Influence
- Bespoke thematic training
- Short [E-learning module](#) (which we'd recommend for all staff in the charity)

For more information contact us via email voiceandinfluence@barnardos.org.uk

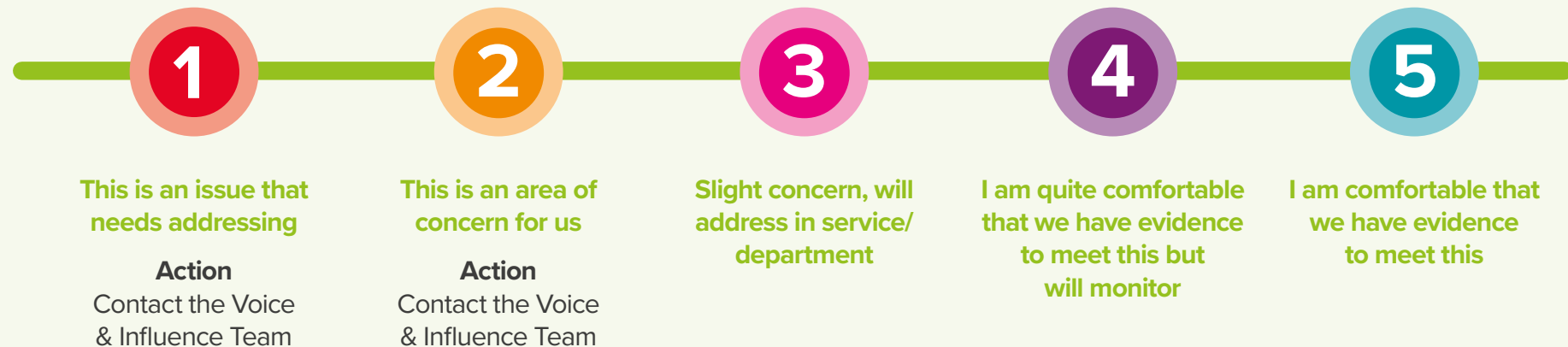


How do I complete the Quality Standards Self-Assessment?

5-point scale

We have developed an online self-assessment form which you can record and measure how you are meeting the Quality Standards.

Each standard can be graded against a **5-point scale**:



[Continued... >](#)



How do I complete the Quality Standards Self-Assessment?

5-point scale – continued...

Your score should be supported with evidence from the last 12 months that demonstrate how you are meeting the Quality Standards, and why you are scoring it what you are.

This scale has been designed to reflect how services will score themselves against the new **Children's Services Quality Effectiveness Framework** – in particular, the Voice and Influence domain.

This domain has the following sections that you are required to score yourself against.

- A. We routinely seek children and young people's views in a safe and ethical manner.
- B. We feel confident facilitating voice and influence work with children and young people.
- C. We are clear about lines of communication and accountability to children and young people.
- D. We embed and evidence children and young people's input in decision-making or actions that we are taking as a result.

At the end of the self-assessment, there is an **action planning form**. This provides a template for identifying areas for development.

The Voice and Influence Team will provide advice, support, training and guidance on how to design and implement action plans – so we can help you make it really impactful.



How do I complete the Quality Standards Self-Assessment?

And don't forget...

Children and young people that you work with should also provide feedback about how they feel you are doing against the Quality Standards. We have developed a number of suggested activities and ideas to support you with this.

We are also developing guidance for facilitating Young Inspectors projects, so young people can review services/ departments self-assessments, and provide them with a young person's perspective on how well they are meeting the standards.



External Policies and Frameworks

Nation-specific

For Northern Ireland, the [Children and Young People's Strategy 2020–2030](#) aims to ensure that children and young people are involved in decision-making processes that affect their lives. The Quality Standards support the aim in this strategy of “*actively encouraging and supporting children and young people to contribute to society and to ensure they are part of decision-making and planning processes on issues which affect them.*”

For services in Wales, the evidence you gather can also be used to achieve the [National Participation Standards for Wales](#).

For services in Scotland, the evidence you gather can also be used as evidence for the nation-specific **Children's Rights Self-Assessment**. It can also demonstrate a commitment to that which [the Promise](#) expects: “*Participation will be embedded in all interactions with Children and young people and families in and on the edge of care to ensure that they are meaningfully involved in all decisions about their lives.*”

For England, [Working Together to Safeguard Children \(2023\)](#) Government guidance which provides a framework for multi-agency cooperation to safeguard children in England. It highlights the importance of involving children and young people in decisions and processes that affect them, including assessment, protection planning and reviewing services. The Quality Standards will help you demonstrate that you are meeting this framework.



External Policies and Frameworks

Service-specific



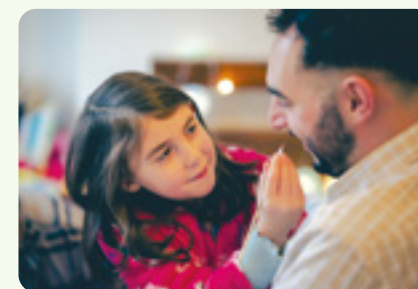
- If your work is funded by a commissioner who is part of the [UNICEF Child-Friendly Cities Programme](#), filling in the self-assessment can help you gather your evidence for the Child Rights Impact Assessment, in particular the heading of Stage 3 – Voice and Evidence.
- If you work on tackling **Child Exploitation**, the Quality Standards have been mapped across to the [‘TCE \(Tackling Child Exploitation\) Joining the Dots Framework.’](#) Young people’s recommendations from this framework have been incorporated into our Quality Standards. They also really closely align with all 8 principles of the TCE Multi Agency Practice Principles for responding to child exploitation and extra familial harm.
- If you work in the **Secure Estate or Youth Justice** context, the Quality Standards have directly incorporated the feedback from young people into its development. We have cross-referenced against Youth Justice Board’s participation strategies and previous examples from Youth Offending Teams who have worked to National Participation Standards in Wales. Our Quality Standards also align to the principles and practice advised in the [‘Participatory Youth Practice Framework’](#) to support children and young people’s meaningful participation in the youth justice system and the [2021–24 YJB Strategic Plan](#) sets out a commitment to 'Child First' Approach, to which our Quality Standards are aligned.



External Policies and Frameworks

Service-specific – continued...

- If you work in the **Health** context, the Quality Standards align with the UK government's '**You're Welcome**': **establishing youth-friendly health and care services** quality standards, which are purposefully aligned with the World Health Organisation's rights-based approach to working with children and young people in healthcare. The Quality Standards also provide a framework to support the implementation of NHS England's statutory guidance for Integrated Care Systems; [Working with People and Communities](#), and how this can be applied to working specifically with children and young people.
- If you work in the **Fostering and Adoption** or Care Pathways context, The Social Care Common Inspection Framework (IF) has a focus on the things that matter most in children's lives. The evaluation criteria are broadly consistent across the different types of children's social care services, but they reflect the unique nature of each type of service. In particular, the Quality Standards will help with measuring the aspect of the framework which looks at *"how well children's views are understood and taken into account and how their rights and entitlements are met"*.



Contact us



For more information, please email the Voice and Influence Team at: voiceandinfluence@barnardos.org.uk

