

Involving children in child rights impact assessment (CRIA):

A case study with Members of
Children's Parliament in East
Lothian, Scotland

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It is important that our voice is heard, and our opinions considered in projects that involve us.

(Member of Children's Parliament)

Established in 1996, Children's Parliament is Scotland's centre of excellence for children's participation and engagement. Our mission is to inspire greater awareness and understanding of the power of children's human rights and to support implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) across Scotland. Through our children's human rights based, creative practice, we provide children up to 14 years of age from diverse backgrounds across Scotland with opportunities to share their experiences, thoughts and feelings so that they can influence positive change in their lives at home, in school and in the community. We use creative, participatory methods to support children to meaningfully engage in decision-making processes, as outlined in the UNCRC.

A brief overview of the East Lothian CRIA project¹

Context: In March 2021, the Scottish Parliament passed the UNCRC (Incorporation) Scotland Bill. As Scotland moves towards making the UNCRC part of the law in Scotland it is imperative that child rights impact assessment (CRIA) and child rights impact evaluation (CRIE) and other measures are adopted to put children's rights at the heart of public authority decision-making.

In support of this, the office of the Children and Young People's Commissioner Scotland (the Commissioner's Office) identified a need to develop knowledge and understanding of how to involve children² and young people in CRIA and CRIE processes, and how this can be applied by public authorities in Scotland. The Commissioner's Office thus worked with partner organisations to undertake the East Lothian CRIA project to learn more about involving children in CRIA and CRIE.

Partnership: The project was facilitated by Children's Parliament with Together (Scottish Alliance for Children's Rights) and the Observatory of Children's Human Rights Scotland. The project was undertaken with East Lothian Council and delivered within the framework of the East Lothian Children's Strategic Partnership.³

Purpose: To develop understanding of and good practice on how children can be involved in CRIA and CRIE processes.

Approach: This project was about putting children's rights at the heart of public authority decision-making. The project took a case-study learning approach centred around the East Lothian Children and Young People's Service Plan and focussed on several key activities including:

- the engagement of a group of children to investigate CRIA and CRIE in East Lothian
- identification of a core group of 'Champions'⁴ who had roles affiliated to the development and delivery of the Children and Young People's Service Plan
- the development of a CRIA on the Children and Young People's Service Plan
- raising awareness and understanding of CRIA and CRIE with the Children's Strategic Partnership and Champions
- capturing, sharing and embedding learning throughout the project.

1 'East Lothian CRIA project' is the short title for 'Involving Children in Child Rights Impact Assessment (CRIA) and Child Rights Impact Evaluation (CRIE): A Case Study in East Lothian'.

2 We use 'children' to mean all children and young people up to the age of 18, in line with the approach taken by the UNCRC.

3 East Lothian is one of 32 local authorities (often called councils) in Scotland. Local government responsibilities and functions are devolved from the Scottish Government to local authorities. The East Lothian Children's Strategic Partnership brings together key organisations involved in supporting children, young people and families in the local authority area. This includes the council, health services, the police and voluntary sector organisations. It provides leadership and direction for services ensuring a multi-agency approach. The partnership is responsible for the Children and Young People's Service Plan.

4 Adults engaged with East Lothian Children's Services Partnership who took part in the East Lothian CRIA project.

Output: A national 'how to' guide on involving children and young people in CRIA/CRIE for the Commissioner's Office.

Children's Parliament worked with over 100 children – who we refer to as Members of Children's Parliament (MCPs)⁵ - aged 8 to 13, across three primary schools and one high school in East Lothian: Letham Mains Primary School, Longniddry Primary School, Yester Primary School and Ross High School. Most of the MCPs involved had not previously engaged in local authority-level participation and, for many, this was their first introduction to children's rights and the UNCRC.

This case study highlights:

- the participating children's views and ideas on involving children in decision-making processes such as CRIA and CRIE
- the Children's Parliament team's reflections on facilitating children's participation in this project

This case study complements two further resources from this project:

- The Observatory report which gives an overview of the reflective learning over the whole project, including both child and adult participants
- The *Listen, engage, have fun* guide, which aims to be a user-friendly guide to involving children in CRIA and CRIE offering practical advice and guidance for decision-makers, policy makers and practitioners

⁵ All children who participate in Children's Parliament's projects and consultations become Members of Children's Parliament. Unlike other parliamentary bodies, Children's Parliament is not an elected body. Rather it is a participatory one, engaging with children up to 14 years of age across Scotland. The quotes and artwork in this case study are directly from the children involved, used with their permission.

What are CRIA and CRIE?⁶

A child rights focussed impact process supports the systematic assessment and communication of the impact of a proposal or measure on the rights, needs and interests of children. The process is meant to be continuous, from assessment of **anticipated impact** (CRIA) through to a review and evaluation of **actual impact** (CRIE).

Child rights impact assessment (CRIA) examines the potential impacts on children and young people of laws, policies, budget decisions, programmes and services as they are being developed and, if necessary, suggests ways to avoid or mitigate any negative impacts.

This is done **prior** to the decision or action being set in place.

Child rights impact evaluation (CRIE) provides an opportunity to consider the intended or unintended effect legislative changes, budget decisions, policies, programmes or services have had on children and young people's rights. Where necessary, the CRIE can propose what changes would be needed to ensure the measure respects children's rights and complies with the UNCRC.

This is done **after** a decision has been made or an action has been taken.

⁶ ENOC (2020) Common framework of reference on child rights impact assessment. A guide on how to carry out CRIA, Strasbourg, France: ENOC. URL. <http://enoc.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/ENOC-Common-Framework-of-Reference-FV.pdf>

The Investigation

Due to COVID-19 restrictions, this project, which we termed an 'investigation', was delivered online and remotely by the Children's Parliament team with support from a staff member in each of the schools.

The investigation aimed to gather the views and ideas of children living in East Lothian, in order to develop knowledge and understanding of how to involve children in CRIA and CRIE processes (with specific reference to the East Lothian Children and Young People's Service Plan), and how this can be applied by public authorities in Scotland.

To achieve this, we designed the process to have two key stages:

Stage 1: We began with remotely delivering a full-day workshop in each of the four schools to all participating MCPs. Ahead of the workshop, we had designed and sent out an activity box to each school which contained materials and resources for the children to use throughout the day. We provided teachers with a facilitators' guide, including an overview of the workshop and how to use the materials. As the Children's Parliament team, we introduced the start of the workshop through an online video-call with the participating children. We then handed over the facilitation to the teachers and checked in throughout the day via video call to see how everyone was getting on and to hear the MCPs' findings and reflections.

Over the course of the day, the MCPs were provided with an introduction to children's rights as outlined in the UNCRC, followed by activities that supported them to reflect on a) how children growing up in East Lothian currently experience their rights and b) where their rights are not being met, what children feel needs to be addressed and improved by the local authority.

Stage 2: In each of the four schools, we worked with teachers to select three children to form our team of twelve 'Investigators'. During weekly online calls facilitated by the Children's Parliament team, the Investigators analysed and discussed the ideas from the initial workshops, comparing and contrasting children's views, ideas and experiences with the priorities set out in the East Lothian Children and Young People's Service Plan. The Investigators led 'missions' with the wider group of MCPs, short activities that were to be completed in between the calls and inform the following investigator session.

Here we outline the themes and activities of the Investigator sessions. For further details on the activities, see the *Listen, engage, have fun* guide.

Investigator session	Main activity	Mission
Session 1	<p>Cross-thematic analysis of the happy, healthy, safe maps created in the initial workshop.</p> <p>Introduction to the East Lothian Children's Service Plan.</p>	Using the three priorities from the Children and Young People's Service Plan, design a postcard with an idea on how to achieve one of these priorities in East Lothian.
Session 2	<p>Feedback on children's ideas on the Children and Young People's Service Plan.</p> <p>An introduction to CRIA and CRIE.</p>	Decorating a megaphone template by answering the question: in an ideal world, what would children's participation in East Lothian look like?
Session 3	<p>Present the megaphone ideas and analyse what children's participation currently looks like in East Lothian.</p> <p>A 'participation party' where the children made 'participation cakes' using air-dry clay, thinking about all the 'ingredients' needed to ensure every child in East Lothian felt like they could take part in decision-making processes.</p>	Write and draw a recipe for your own participation cake.
Session 4	<p>The Great East Lothian Bake Off – feeding back the 'participation cake' ideas.</p> <p>Head, hands, heart – the children drew an outline of themselves on a big piece of paper and filled it in with words and drawings that they felt were key to an ideal facilitator of children's participation.</p>	Grand ideas: using one of the most common suggestions from the megaphone mission, bring this idea to life and imagine how it could work in East Lothian. The children explored the following; an app, an online survey, a post box and a pupil council.
Session 5	<p>Present and gather feedback on grand ideas.</p> <p>Prepare for a final presentation of all the work</p>	A final presentation where the Investigators shared their work with the East Lothian Children's Strategic Partnership.

Reflecting on his role as an Investigator, Ben (age 11) shared:

'I think it's a good way to improve children's rights and lets our voice be heard.'

The Findings

In the full-class workshop, after an initial introduction to the UNCRC, the MCPs began their investigation discussing and sharing children experiences of growing up in East Lothian. They created maps of their local area, identifying spaces where they feel, and do not feel, happy, healthy, and safe. This task was designed to a) support the MCPs reflect on how children experience, and do not experience, their rights in East Lothian and b) compare their own priorities for improving services for children across the region with those identified by adults in the Children and Young People's Service Plan (the Plan). The MCPs then designed postcards, sharing their ideas and reflections on the Plan, the impact of the plan to date, and how the plan can be improved to better realise children's rights across East Lothian.

In the Investigators' session, the Investigators noticed clear patterns emerging when comparing the maps and postcards from across the four schools. For example, most children felt happy, healthy and safe at home, in school and in a variety of sports and activities centres across East Lothian. Outdoor spaces, such as beaches and parks, were frequently cited as spaces where children enjoy spending time with friends and family, playing and keeping active. The maps also highlighted areas of concern, worry and frustration for children including:

- Dirty, littered beaches
- Lack of frequent, well-connected and affordable public transport hindering children's ability to participate in clubs and activities
- Lack of streetlights making children feel unsafe when walking or playing on the streets.

The maps and postcards revealed inconsistencies across the region, which the Investigators found interesting to reflect on with one another:

I enjoyed thinking about things that could change that I've never really thought about before. It was interesting to see every other school's views on what could be done in their local area, and how it was different to ours. (Amelie, age 11, Investigator)

In other parts of East Lothian, they [children] don't have the opportunity to go play on a football pitch because it's so far away.

(Lewis, age 9, Investigator)

The maps and postcards also demonstrated MCPs' understanding and recognition of the inequalities and discrimination experienced by children from marginalised and/or disadvantaged backgrounds. Many chose to reflect on the challenges experienced by disabled children, suggesting that more ramps and accessible playpark equipment are needed at school and in the

community. MCPs suggested further support should be directed towards families living in poverty by increasing the number of foodbanks and efforts made to reduce the stigma children can face, such as by offering a cereal bar to everyone.

I thought a cereal bar would be good. Some people don't get food in the morning. It would be for everyone because some people can get embarrassed if they can't eat at home. I think there will be quite a few children across East Lothian who don't have breakfast at home.

(Evie, age 9, Investigator)

After comparing the MCPs' key issues and ideas with the overarching priorities outlined in the Plan, there were commonalities in how they envision children's rights being fulfilled in East Lothian, mainly focussed around reducing inequalities for children. For example, the MCPs had some great ideas for the inclusion of disabled children, increasing opportunities for children to participate in various sports and activities, and providing greater support for children living in poverty. However, the MCPs raised key children's rights issues (particularly around unsafe, unclean and poorly connected community spaces and play areas, as outlined above) and the opportunities and challenges for addressing these that were not addressed nor highlighted in the Plan.

The Investigation findings suggest that, had a CRIA been undertaken with the involvement of children to inform the development of the Plan, it could likely have looked quite different.

The advice that I would give to adults would be that maybe they should just listen to children's voices once in a while because it might help them make a better world for children. (MCP, age 11)

Having our say: Involving children in CRIA

As the Investigation unfolded, it became evident that for many children, opportunities to have their say in decisions being made at a community and local authority level are few and far between. Decorating 'megaphones', MCPs gave examples of how children can currently have their say or share worries or concerns – such as with trusted adults at home or school, in school councils or child helplines. Few MCPs could name or recollect existing ways they could share their views, concerns or feedback on issues and decisions affecting them or their peers at a community or local authority level. Very few MCPs were able to identify examples of being asked about their views, experiences and ideas, the only concrete example shared being a survey some of the primary-school-aged children had completed about travelling to school.

Once a year we get a survey at school asking how we travel to school. We never hear the results or what happens with that.

(Amelie, age 11, Investigator)

This example highlighted the lack of ongoing dialogue between children and adults, given that little or no feedback had been provided and the children were not sure of the outcome of their participation – something that needs to be rectified. Against this backdrop, involving children in CRIA processes is harder because of the lack of existing engagement at school, community and/or local authority level.

Despite this, this investigation highlighted that many children are eager and enthusiastic about participating in decisions being made, and feel strongly that, by involving them, their interests will be better represented in day-to-day life. Many MCPs expressed that they want to be part of shaping the world around them, for their own benefit and for realising the rights and wellbeing of other children:

I would like people to invest in making children have a happy life.

(Ruby, age 11, Investigator)

I want to know how to change East Lothian and make it a better place.

(DJ, age 11, Investigator)

The MCPs were tasked with coming up with ways for decision-makers to routinely engage children in CRIA (and decision-making processes more broadly) so that decision-makers can understand and prevent potential negative impacts on children's rights and take the opportunity to actively progress children's rights. The MCPs imagined fantastic, creative ideas giving children opportunities to offer their views, ideas and suggestions including:

- an ideas post box in every school and community centre
- a participation app
- a semi-regular regional survey
- a Council email and phone helpline especially for children and young people
- improved pupil councils

The MCPs from each school chose one of the suggestions to develop into a 'grand idea':

- **Longniddry's Precious Process - a survey for children's ideas and views.** The mascot is a Lego Man called 'Pat' and he leads you through the survey questions, known as the 'layers of life'. It is accessed online and will be completed by children in school so that they are not swayed by parents at home.
- **Ross High's Accessible Post Box.** Located in a local leisure centre, this yellow post box will be available for children to share their opinions. Its goal is to help get children's opinions across. There will be slots at different heights so it can be used independently by everyone regardless of their height. There will be a poster by the post box updated monthly with adults' responses to children's ideas.

- **Letham Mains' Your Voice Matters – a Pupil Council or Children's Parliament in every school.** Within every school, each year group will elect one boy and one girl for the council. They will meet weekly to represent the views of their year group, and then will meet monthly with the pupil councils from other schools to represent all voices of East Lothian.
- **Yester's Young Minds – an App for feeding back.** Two different versions of the app for different age groups, with a dedicated device to the app in each school so it can be used by children as and when they please.

The Great East Lothian Bake Off: Recipes for meaningful children's participation

In the final part of the investigation, all participating MCPs were tasked with making a recipe for 'meaningful children's participation', as if they were writing the recipe for a cake. This activity supported the children to discuss and explore what meaningful participation can mean to children and the many forms this can take. The Investigators combined the ingredients from all the schools' participation cakes to create one giant 'showstopper' participation cake which included: 'kind-le' (a kind candle), teamwork, children's ideas, safety, trust, mutual respect, determination, confidence and understanding. They finished off the cake with the 'icing' - in other words, the skills, qualities and attributes of adults who facilitate children's participation: respectful and kind body language, ability to make children feel joyful, respected and included, positivity, including and understanding children, good listener, approachable, thinking about how to improve children's rights.

Key Reflections on the Process

As facilitators of the children's investigation, here are some of our reflections on what worked well and what we felt could have improved this process overall.

What worked well:

- Creating strong partnership with schools at the beginning, with clear expectations and channels of communication.
- Putting relationships at the heart of the process – establishing a positive, welcoming and fun tone to the project enabled us to develop relationships quickly and effectively with the children, despite this all taking place remotely.
- Working together with the children in a hybrid way (both whole class and Investigator sessions) – this kept the process feeling interactive, creative, dynamic and fun.
- Bringing children together from across the four schools – despite distance, we saw positive, supportive friendships forming between the Investigators as they grew in confidence when expressing their views and ideas.
- Creating a space for children to take the lead as much as possible. The Investigators, in particular, took ownership of the project and sought opportunities to lead on activities and games, and support each other if technical issues arose.

What could have been better:

- Having the opportunity to work directly with children. Local authority-wide Covid restrictions meant we were unable to deliver in person, and this meant we had limits on the type of activities we could deliver and were entirely reliant on technology being on our side.
- Having more time for sessions. Our weekly Investigator sessions were only 90 minutes long. Any longer and the children (and adults!) would lose focus, but it did limit the amount of activity we could get through in any one occasion.
- Having more time and resources to create adapted versions of the missions for the younger MCPs – as the project evolved, we found some of the teachers needed extra support to comprehend and communicate the task to their younger pupils. The teachers were incredibly accommodating and cooperative, but we recognise this added a layer of extra work for them.
- Greater engagement from the Champions throughout the process. Due to time constraints and the busy schedules of everyone involved, it was challenging finding ways to meaningfully bring the children and adults together. Whilst the Champions reflected that their engagement with the children was positive and impactful (see the Observatory report), it was squeezed into such limited windows that it was difficult to facilitate at times. We are hopeful the reflections on this project will open doors and both strengthen existing, and create new, opportunities for meaningful children's participation in East Lothian going forward.

Conclusion

Adults, listen to your kids! Teachers, listen to your students! Listen to their rights. (MCP, age 11)

As Scotland moves towards incorporation of the UNCRC and mechanisms such as CRIA and CRIE become a core part of its implementation, it is important that adults and children alike see the value and importance of using such tools for realising children's rights.

As our investigation demonstrates, children are experts in their own lives. When presented with meaningful, routine opportunities to share their views, ideas and experiences, we will have laws, policies, budget decisions, programmes and services that better reflect children's best interests.

Rather than another 'tick-box' exercise, CRIA and CRIE – as well as other forms of participatory decision-making tools – are a way to consider the impact of measures with a children's rights lens. When children themselves are brought into this process, this lens is clearer, sharper and, as we found, brighter. After all, as we demonstrated through our approach to this investigation, engaging with children is dynamic, creative and a lot of fun. When children feel energised and valued, and have built positive, trusting relationships with adults interested in hearing their views and ideas, the magic happens and positive outcomes for children and adults are significantly strengthened.

Artwork / writing credits

Artwork by: Investigators and MCPs at Letham Mains Primary School, Longniddry Primary School, Yester Primary School and Ross High School.

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