Children on rights and responsibilities
A report of children’s views by the Children’s Rights Director for England
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The law sets out my duties as Children’s Rights Director for England. With my team, one of my main duties is to ask children and young people for their views about their rights and welfare and how they are looked after in England. My duties cover children and young people living away from home in all types of boarding schools, residential special schools or further education colleges, children and young people living in children’s homes, in family centres, in foster care or who have been placed for adoption, and care leavers and children or young people getting any sort of help from council social care services.

As well as asking young people for their views and publishing what they tell us, with my team I also give advice on children’s and young people’s views and on children’s rights and welfare to Her Majesty’s Chief Inspector at Ofsted, and to the Government. I have a duty to raise any issues I think are important about the rights and welfare of children or young people living away from home or getting children’s social care support. With my team, I do this both for individual young people and for whole groups of young people.

There are discussions among politicians these days about having a new Bill or Act of Parliament setting out people’s rights and responsibilities in Britain. This will need to include the rights and responsibilities of children, and I and my team have carried out this consultation with children and young people so that their views about their rights and responsibilities can be taken into account when such a Bill or Act of Parliament is written.

We try to write all our reports so that they can easily be read by children and young people, as well as by government ministers. Like all my reports, this report is being published for everyone to read. You can find copies of all my reports on our website: www.rights4me.org.
How we asked for views

We asked children and young people for their views in three ways. First, we held a national children’s conference at the Flamingo Land theme park in Yorkshire, where we invited children and young people from care services and residential schools and colleges across the country to fill in a set of survey question cards to give us their views about children’s rights and responsibilities. They could hand these cards in to us at six staffed ‘bases’ around the theme park, in return for high street vouchers and entry into a prize draw. They were also free to tour the theme park and enjoy the rides and attractions there.

Second, we invited children and young people in services we selected at random to fill in a survey questionnaire on rights and responsibilities. They were able to complete this survey online through the web, or if they preferred, to complete a paper copy of the survey and send it back to us.

Third, we visited four boarding schools and one residential special school. At each school we held a discussion group with pupils there about rights and responsibilities, to give us the chance to have a deeper discussion about some of the issues. In one school we met two different groups, so we held six group discussions altogether. Each group was led by a member of our team, and another team member took notes of the views people gave.

We chose at random which schools to visit, and which services to send invitations to asking children and young people to take part in our survey. We sent invitations to our Flamingo Land conference to services across the country, and accepted applications in the order they reached us until all the places were filled.

Not everybody answered every question in the survey or on our question cards, so we have given the number who did answer for each question in this report. Where we have given the percentage of people giving a particular answer, this is the percentage of everyone who answered that question.

Writing and talking about ideas like rights and responsibilities, rather than people’s own experiences, made this a specially challenging consultation. But we were very impressed by the superb answers and ideas that so many children and young people – including very young children – gave us for this report.

We have not left out any views that either we or politicians might disagree with, nor have we made our own comments on anything children or young people told us. We have not added our own views or ideas. What this report says is purely the views of children and young people.

‘If you are a citizen, society collapses without rights’
Altogether, we received written views from 1,834 children and young people. These included sets of question cards filled in by 792 children and young people at our Flamingo Land conference, 850 children and young people who sent in their views through our web survey, and 192 who sent in written survey questionnaires to us. As well as these, eight young people sent us their views through our special questionnaire using Widget symbols. We also met another 46 children and young people in our six different school discussion groups. Altogether, 1,888 children and young people gave us their views on rights and responsibilities for this report.

Of the 1,753 people who filled in our survey and who told us their gender, 943 (54%) were boys and 810 (46%) were girls. Out of the 1,640 who told us their age in the survey, the youngest child was four and the oldest young person was 24. The ‘middle’ age was 13.

Out of the 1,731 people who told us about their ethnicity in our survey, 1,476 (85%) said they were white, 96 (6%) said they were Asian, 85 (5%) said they were from a mixed background and 59 (3%) said they were Black.

Out of 1,835 people who told us in the survey whether or not they were disabled, 313 (17%) said they were disabled. Out of these 313 people, 152 (49%) said they had a learning difficulty, and 29 (9%) that they had attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). These were the most common disabilities they told us about.

Out of the 1,834 children and young people who filled in our survey, 1,731 told us the sort of place they were living in. The three most usual places were in a children’s home as a child in care, living at home with parents or relatives, and in a boarding school. Figure 1 shows the details.

Figure 1: Where children and young people were living

- Children’s home, 35%
- Boarding school, 20%
- Foster home, 15%
- Residential special school, 5%
- With parents or relatives with social care support, 20%
- Further education college, 1%
- In own place as a care leaver, 2%

Percentages based on 1,731 responses. Percentages are rounded up and may not add up to exactly 100.

‘You can’t get rights and have no responsibilities - that’s selfish’
Is having one list of rights and responsibilities a good idea?

Our first survey question was whether children and young people thought it was a good idea to have all the rights and responsibilities that everyone has in this country written down in one place. As Figure 2 shows, a large majority (70%) of those who answered this question thought that it would be a good idea to have one list of the rights and responsibilities everyone has, but a quarter (25%) thought this would not be a good idea.

Figure 2: Is one list of all rights and responsibilities a good idea?

Yes, 70%

Not sure, 5%

No, 25%

Percentages based on 1,711 responses

In our survey, 1,359 people told us their reasons for giving the answer they did to this question. The top two reasons for saying it would be good to have one list of rights and responsibilities, which both came from more than one in 10 of those who gave reasons, were first that it is important for people to know what rights they have and what is expected of them (530 people, 39% of those answering this question, said this or something very close to it); and second that having a list of rights and responsibilities would help people to have their say and be listened to (this idea came from 164 people, 12% of those answering this question): ‘because all young people and adults should have their say’. The next reason, the one other reason that came from over 100 people, was that having a single list of rights and responsibilities would help things to become more equal and fair.

In our discussion groups we talked more about the idea of having a list of rights and responsibilities in one place. Some told us they thought it would be a good idea because ‘you would not have people taking advantage’ by not knowing about their own responsibilities and rights. One group thought that any list of rights and responsibilities should compare what rights and responsibilities people in this country have with what those in other countries have: ‘Comparison with other countries may make us appreciate what we have more.’

Not so many people gave any particular reason for saying that having a list of rights and responsibilities was a bad idea. No one reason for this view came from as many as one in 10 people who answered this question. The four most common reasons given for this view were that people already know about their rights and responsibilities (this came from 22 children and young people), that people should not be told what to do (this also came from 22 people), that individual people are too different to have a single list of everyone’s rights and responsibilities (which came from 21 people), and that even with a list, people might not read or follow them (from 19 people).

‘Rights and responsibilities should not be changing with a new government every new election; they should be consistent and have a basis’
One group saw rights and responsibilities as the basis for people to live together: ‘If you are a citizen, society collapses without them.’ Listing them in one place made good sense: ‘if it’s listed, it’s written down and everything is included’; ‘avoids uncertainty and creates a foundation’.

Three of our six discussion groups linked rights and responsibilities together: ‘shows that you got to do something to get something’; ‘you can’t get rights and have no responsibilities – that’s selfish’; ‘you would not value the right if it does not go with a responsibility’. One group thought that rights and responsibilities should be linked so that ‘more responsibilities earns more rights’; ‘the more you have, the more you give out’. One group gave voting as an example of a linked right and responsibility: ‘responsibility to vote – you should use your right to vote’.

One group told us that they thought that they had not been told much about their rights or responsibilities, and had not heard about the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. They would be interested to know exactly what their rights and responsibilities were – ‘Schools don’t make you really aware of legal issues’ – but after discussing what might go into a national list of rights and responsibilities they thought that most of it already happened anyway – ‘The rights are just normal life to us’ – and the United Nations Convention ‘does not really have a direct effect on you because you do it anyway’.

One young person wrote to us about how they thought rights and responsibilities should stay the same over the years: ‘Rights and responsibilities should not be changing with a new government every new election; they should be consistent and have a basis.’

Here are some quotations from children and young people who were in favour of having a list of rights and responsibilities in one place.

‘Because a lot of people are unaware of some of their rights and responsibilities’

‘Because every child has the right to know their rights and responsibilities’

‘Because everybody will know where they stand’

‘Because everybody should be equal and have a right to say their opinion’

‘Everybody should have some rights and responsibilities – but not too many’

‘Because if they are written down nobody can change them’

‘Because in the end it will help me and other people who like me are in care’

‘It gives the same importance and reassurance to both adults and children, putting them on the same wavelength’

‘It means everyone is clear about our rights and responsibilities, which will make us more aware and responsible’

‘Because then we know what we can do and what can’t be done to us and what we can’t do’

‘Better understanding of how you need to behave and be treated’
Here are some quotations from children and young people who were against the idea of having a list of rights and responsibilities in one place.

- ‘Because different people have different abilities and skills and not everyone can be responsible for the same things’
- ‘Because everyone will be arguing if they don’t get what they want and the system breaks down’
- ‘Because in general both the welfare of children and adults are adequate’
- ‘Because people will take all the rights over the top and start complaining and mess everything up’
- ‘I do not think this is a good idea because I think the parents know the best for their children’
- ‘I don’t think it’s a good idea because it makes it sound like the Government is trying to be controlling the whole of Britain’
- ‘I don’t think people would read it’

And here are quotations from young people who weren’t sure which way to answer the question.

- ‘I don’t really mind whether this happens, even though I probably should’
- ‘I’m not really bothered to be honest like’
- ‘Depends what rights they are’
- ‘It could be good in the sense that children in danger can use them, however during arguments they could be used irrationally’
- ‘It is good that people are thinking about it but I don’t see the point of writing a list’
- ‘Who writes this Bill? Are people involved? Will there be enforcement if people ignore it?’
- ‘I don’t really know because I think adults might not see children’s rights’
The responsibilities of children and young people

We asked children and young people filling in our survey to tell us what they thought were the most important responsibilities that all children should have. We said that a responsibility is something everyone is expected to do, for themselves, for other people or for the world we live in. Each person could give up to three answers. We did not give any suggestions about what children’s responsibilities might be, so the answers came entirely from the children and young people themselves.

A responsibility is something everyone is expected to do, for themselves, for other people or for the world we live in

Altogether we had 3,981 suggestions from the 1,373 children and young people who answered this question, which added up into 48 different answers. However, many people confused rights with responsibilities, and 24 of these answers were to do with things we thought were rights rather than responsibilities. That left 24 different responsibilities that were put forward by children and young people.

Here are the top 10 responsibilities listed by 1,373 children and young people in our survey. These are therefore the top responsibilities that children themselves told us children should all have.

In our school discussion groups, children gave many more detailed examples of these same responsibilities. In one special school, the list of suggested responsibilities included being kind, taking care of others, helping others who need your help, learning things, going to school, being nice, helping poor people, doing your jobs nicely, not drinking too much beer, making sure you don’t hurt yourself, cheering sad people up and taking care of the world. On safety they told us they thought children should be responsible to ‘look, listen and do safe things around the road’. They also said they had a responsibility not to carry out crimes, ‘not to steal’ and ‘not to drop litter’.

Some things could be seen as both a responsibility and a right. We heard, for example, that if people have a right to have a say about what happens, then they have a responsibility to use that right and to give their opinion. In one group, young people discussed the issue of making choices, but actually decided that making choices is really a responsibility rather than a right, because you have the responsibility to try to make good choices.

Another group said more about being consulted, and said clearly that children and young people have a ‘responsibility to make your issues heard’. On discrimination, they said they had a responsibility ‘to accept people’s differences – cultural differences should not be taking the mick’.

One group thought that while it is possible to make a list of responsibilities everyone should have, this would never cover a lot, because ‘responsibilities are different for each person’.

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**Children’s top 10 responsibilities**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Responsibility</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Responsibility for your own behaviour and actions</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making use of your education</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Showing respect to others</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsibility for your own safety</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Looking after others</td>
<td>19%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Looking after yourself</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your own health and hygiene</td>
<td>14%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Carrying out your responsibilities around the house</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Looking after the environment</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Giving your opinion</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Percentages of 1,373 children and young people responding to this question.
The responsibility of children and young people towards their families was raised by one group. They thought everyone has a responsibility towards their parents, but there is a limit to this if their parents have not carried out their own responsibility to look after their children properly. Children should ‘respect their parents unless they are out of order’. This group did think though that different people would have very different views on what exactly was out of order, even if parents had been ‘evil’: ‘There are different perceptions of what “evil” is.’

Another responsibility raised in our groups was about how children and young people influenced other children and young people. Because ‘peer pressure is a big influence’, there was a responsibility to ‘be a good influence to peers’, but also to ‘help people avoid bad influences’. You should ‘influence people positively’. This still needed people to have ‘basic moral values that people uphold’ though, because it is not always easy to decide ‘what is positive and what is negative’. A list of rights and responsibilities could help with this, by being ‘a good reference document’.

As well as being responsible in how you influence other children and young people in the same age group, one of our discussion groups talked about a responsibility to show ‘respect for other age groups’, which meant ‘respect elders and help the younger ones’. However, ‘it should be for everyone – it works both ways’, and the young people in this group thought that their elders should also show respect for young people and not treat them negatively; as one person put it, in their experience ‘you can walk into a shop and they just look at you’.

The groups gave us some examples of ways children can take responsibility for the environment: ‘don’t litter’; ‘don’t leave chewing gum on the street’; ‘turn taps off’; ‘recycle’; ‘don’t leave lights on – should be a responsibility to conserve energy’. One group said: ‘We do this because the earth will then live longer.’

On the responsibility to look after yourself and your own health, one group gave the example of listening to advice about, and using, sunscreen. This should prevent cancer, which would also help to reduce pressure on the health service. ‘You shouldn’t take drugs or smoke, and put on sunscreen and study.’ Among the children who gave us their views using our questionnaire in Widget symbols, some gave us a very practical example of what being responsible for looking after yourself can mean – ‘to get out of the building when the fire alarm goes off’. Also in our Widget answers we had a summary of many other responsibilities: ‘To keep the world safe. To keep other persons safe’; and ‘Children should not hit any other children.’

A key responsibility for any citizen, according to one group, is to attempt to get a job. Another is to ‘contribute to society and the community’.

Finally, one group raised the question of how far everyone should have the responsibility to obey the laws of the country. They thought this should be a responsibility everyone should have, but there were two conditions to this. One was that they had been given the right information about what the law expected of them: ‘the Government making it available and accessible to everyone’. The other condition was that ‘the law must be reasonable’. Three quotes from their discussion show how their thinking went on the question of what to do if laws were not reasonable: ‘Do you have the responsibility to obey unreasonable laws?’; ‘if you disobey it might be harmful to you and your family’; ‘we should have the right to speak out against unreasonable laws’.

‘Don’t leave lights on – should be a responsibility to conserve energy’
Children’s votes on children’s rights

A ‘right’ is something you should always be able to do, to have, to know, to say or to be protected from.¹

We used our survey to find out which children’s rights were most important to the children and young people we consulted. We told children what is meant by a ‘right’, as in the box above. We gave children and young people a list of 36 different children’s rights to vote on. They could vote for as many as they wanted, and could give each right either one or two votes.

Our list of rights came from three different places. First, we listed the main rights we thought specially relevant to children from the UK’s Human Rights Act. Second, we listed the main children’s rights from the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Third, we listed 10 extra things that other children and young people had suggested should be made into rights for all children. The 1,834 children and young people in our survey cast a total of 66,781 votes on rights. There was a good spread of votes, with the top right on the list getting 70% more votes than the bottom scoring one.

Here are the results of the children and young people’s vote on the importance of rights. The rights which received the most votes are at the top. The rights that had been suggested by other children and young people are printed on a red background. The rights that came from the Human Rights Act are on a yellow background, and the ones from the United Nations Convention are on a blue background.

¹ The same definition of a ‘right’ has now also been used in the Government’s Young people’s guide to the Green Paper on rights and responsibilities, Ministry of Justice, 2009; www.justice.gov.uk/publications/young-persons-guide-rights-responsibilities.htm.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>The children’s rights list – in children’s priority order</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>To be protected from abuse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>To have an education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>To be helped to keep alive and well</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Not to be discriminated against because of my race, colour, sex, disability, language or beliefs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Not to be treated or punished in a way that is cruel or meant to make me feel bad about myself</td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Special help for any child with a disability</td>
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<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>To have privacy</td>
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<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Not to be bullied</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>To keep in touch with my parents, grandparents, brothers and sisters if I want to and they want to, wherever we all live</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>To have my private letters, phone calls, emails and messages kept confidential</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>To be protected from using illegal drugs</td>
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<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>If I am arrested, to be told why, in a language I can understand</td>
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<td>13</td>
<td>To have my own opinions and to say what they are</td>
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<td>14</td>
<td>Not to be locked up unless the law says I have to be</td>
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<td>15</td>
<td>To be helped to be healthy</td>
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<td>16</td>
<td>To have respect for the way I live my life</td>
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<td>17</td>
<td>Not to be made to do work that may be harmful to me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>To be able to play and do enjoyable activities</td>
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<td></td>
<td>The children’s rights list – in children’s priority order</td>
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<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>To spend time with other people</td>
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<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>To follow my own culture, beliefs and religion</td>
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<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>To be cared for by my own parents unless that isn’t in my best interests</td>
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<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>To enjoy myself now, as well as to prepare for the future</td>
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<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>To be told about my past life if and when I wish to know</td>
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<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>To be treated as an individual, not as one of a group of children</td>
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<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>To give my views about things that affect me and have my views make a difference if I am old enough</td>
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<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>To keep and use my own possessions</td>
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<td>27</td>
<td>To make and keep my own friends</td>
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<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>To have my views, wishes, worries and feelings asked about and thought about when people decide things for me, however old I am</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>To make decisions for myself if I understand enough, whatever age I am</td>
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<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>To do hobbies I want to do</td>
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<tr>
<td>31</td>
<td>Always to get the help the law says I should</td>
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<tr>
<td>32</td>
<td>People looking after me should always do what is in my best interests</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33</td>
<td>To be treated well and fairly if I have broken the law</td>
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<tr>
<td>34</td>
<td>To speak in my own language</td>
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<tr>
<td>35</td>
<td>To read books and get information in other ways too</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36</td>
<td>To get information from other people</td>
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</table>
We think that this is an extremely important list to be taken on board in writing any future Bill or Act setting out rights that apply to children. It tells any government what children’s rights these children themselves have rated as the most important. It is also important that it gives clear rankings of rights that have been suggested by children in our earlier consultations, alongside rights that already exist in the Human Rights Act or United Nations Convention.

The list clearly shows that some rights that are not already in the Human Rights Act or the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, but have been suggested by children themselves in the past, are seen by children in our survey as more important than some of the Human Rights Act or Convention rights. The two top rights that came from children themselves and which score more highly than most Human Rights Act or Convention rights are the right not to be bullied, and the right to keep in touch with parents, grandparents, brothers and sisters as long as each person wants to keep in touch. These are the top additional rights that, according to the children we have consulted, should be given force in any new Act, Bill or charter listing the rights and responsibilities of citizens of this country.

Top of the list of rights according to children in our survey came the right not to be abused, to have an education, and to be helped to keep alive and well. What came next may not be what adults might have expected. The fourth most important right according to these children was the right not to suffer discrimination, followed by the right not to be subject to cruel or demeaning treatment or punishment. The next two were the right for disabled children to have special help, and the right for children to have privacy. The right to confidentiality of letters, phone calls, emails and messages came very high up on the list, next after not being bullied and being able to keep in touch with relatives.

There is also an important group of rights that was suggested before by children and young people, and that came in the middle of the list. These included the right for a child to enjoy life now, as well as prepare for the future; to be told about their past life if and when they wish to know; and to be treated as an individual rather than as one of a group of children.

Rights about consultation and children’s views came in various places on the list. The right for children to have their own opinions and to say what they are came 13th out of 36, and the right to give views about things that affect a child and have those views make a difference if the child is old enough came two thirds of the way down the list in 25th place. The right of a child of any age to have their views, wishes, worries and feelings thought about by people making decisions about them came 28th, and the right for children to make their own decisions when they understand enough came 29th. It is important to note, though, that when in our next question we asked children and young people what new right they thought all children ought to have, the right to ‘have a say’ came top of the list. Children in our consultation thought many rights were more important than being consulted about things, but that being consulted was the main area where children’s rights need improving.

Out of the three lowest scoring rights (in places 34, 35 and 36), two were to do with the right to be given information, from books and other sources, and from other people, and the third-lowest scoring right was the right of a child to speak in their own language.
Children’s reasons for their votes

Often when people vote for things, we only know the total votes, and not why individuals voted in particular ways. Given the importance of getting children’s rights right in any future government Bill or Act setting out people’s rights in this country, we asked children in our survey not only to give us their votes, but also to give us their reasons for how they voted.

Here is a summary of the reasons given by children and young people for voting for each of the children’s rights on our list:

**To be protected from abuse**
The main reasons for voting for this as the top right on the list were that abuse affects children’s well-being, and that the right not to be abused helps children to live their own lives well and be kept safe and not be hurt, and that abuse of children is simply not right and should not be allowed to happen. Apart from these main reasons, some children believed that protecting people from abuse also helped to stop them becoming abusers in their turn.

**To have an education**
Children voted for the right to an education because it enables them to get a job, to learn and to live their lives well, and gives them a better future. Most of the individual reasons given for this right were to do with education helping children for their future, rather than for their present.

**To be helped to keep alive and well**
Children told us that this right to help is needed to be able to live, to live a healthy life and to have well-being. Being helped to stay alive and well was one right that was seen as a basic right just ‘because it is a right’.

**Not to be discriminated against because of my race, colour, sex, disability, language or beliefs**
The main reason children gave for voting for this right was that we are all equal. Other reasons were that discrimination affects a person’s well-being, that discrimination is simply wrong and that it is important that differences between people are respected. Apart from these main reasons, some children said that having a right not to be discriminated against helped people to be happy, and some others wrote about the effect of this right on the world.

**Not to be treated or punished in a way that is cruel or meant to make me feel bad about myself**
Children chose this right because it avoids damaging children’s feelings, confidence and self-esteem. As with many other rights, many children wrote to us that this sort of treatment or punishment simply shouldn’t happen. Some wrote about the impact of this kind of treatment being damaging, others that this right is also part of keeping children safe and not abusing them, and that everyone should be treated like a human. A few wrote that children treated or punished in this way might kill themselves.

**Special help for any disabled child**
There were two main reasons for voting for this as a right. The first was that disabled children need more help and support than other people. The second reason was that this special help is needed in order to be fair and equal to those with disabilities. Some wrote that being disabled is not someone’s fault, so they deserve special help. Others told us that they thought special help was needed to help disabled children be happy and have a chance in life. A few made the point that giving special help depended on whether a disabled child actually needed help, and should depend on the individual’s situation.
To have privacy
In explaining why they voted for a right to privacy, many children told us there were different things they thought were important to all children that they believed would be covered by a right to have privacy. The first of these was the need for each child to have their ‘own space’ somewhere. The second was the need for children to have time for themselves, without being with others all the time. The third was the need for children’s information and messages to and from children to be kept confidential, and protected from other people knowing things they didn’t need to know about a child. Some said that everyone, not only children, needs to have enough privacy in their lives. Others told us that privacy is important in helping children to be safe, and to keep their dignity.

Not to be bullied
The two top reasons for voting for this right were the bad effects that being bullied can have for someone, and the view that bullying is simply something that should not happen. Some wrote about how bullying can take away someone’s confidence, health, well-being, or their ability to have a good life.

To keep in touch with my parents, grandparents, brothers and sisters if I want to and they want to, wherever we all live
Two top reasons stood out for voting for this new right. One was that keeping contact with people who matter to them is very important to children, and the second was that family is important for every child. Others wrote about the importance of every person having love and bonds with someone else, and that contact with family makes people who they are.

To have my private letters, phone calls, emails and messages kept confidential
The main reason for voting for this right was that if letters, phone calls, emails and messages are intended to be confidential, then that is what they should be. No one else should know what is in them and they should stay personal and confidential. Some also said that they had voted for this right because it was a part of the privacy that they thought children should be entitled to.

To be protected from using illegal drugs
The reasons children and young people gave us for supporting this right were mainly about the seriousness of the effects that drugs can have. They told us they had voted for this one because of the harmful effects, including damage to health, and some children mentioned that drugs can kill. Some wrote that having this as a right should make information and help to avoid or come off drugs much more available.

If I am arrested, to be told why, in a language I can understand
This right earned votes mainly because it would mean people would know what they had done wrong in order to be arrested, and because children and young people thought that there was a need for anybody who is arrested to know and understand what is happening. Some said that because people speak many different languages, this right is needed in order to treat different people fairly and equally.

To have my own opinions and to say what they are
The main reason for voting for this as a right was to make sure that everyone’s individual views and opinions can always be put forward. Some told us that this would give people an ‘ownership’ over decisions that affected them.
Not to be locked up unless the law says I have to be
Children’s top reason for supporting this right was that it is needed to make sure that the way people are treated is fair and just. Others wrote about the need for people who deserved punishment to be punished, and for people who didn’t to stay free.

To be helped to be healthy
The main reasons given for voting for this as a right were that children thought everyone needed to be as healthy as they could be (some said this was so that they could live longer, others so that they could be happy), and to keep people as fit as possible. There was also a clear view that this being a right would make sure that advice on health was available to people.

To have respect for the way I live my life
People told us they had voted for this right because it would help people make the best of their own lives and let them be themselves, to make personal choices and to be respected as the people they were. Some said it would help people to live a happy life, and would help everybody to be treated the same. Some others said that this would help people to learn from the consequences of their actions.

Not to be made to do work that may be harmful to me
Children voting for this right told us that it was necessary to make sure that children were not hurt, did not suffer from harm and were kept safe. Some said that being made to do harmful work was simply wrong. Some others said that it was wrong to force people to do any particular sort of work.

To be able to play and do enjoyable activities
Children supported this right because they believed that it is important for children to enjoy life and have fun. They also supported it because it would help to keep children healthy and fit. A third main reason for voting for this right was that it would help children and young people to make friends and socialise with each other, which children believed was very important. Some others told us that this right would help to stop young people becoming bored, that it would help to make sure that a child could simply ‘be a kid’, that it would help people to live their own lives in their own way, and that it is important for people to be able to relax.

To spend time with other people
Supporters of this right told us that it is important for everyone to be able to socialise, and that a right to do this would also help to make sure that people got to know other people and learned very important social and communication skills that everyone needs. Some others wrote that this right could help to counter loneliness, and that it could help with both learning and enjoyment.

To follow my own culture, beliefs and religion
There were two main, but linked, reasons given by people who voted for this right. One was that this right means that people can make a personal choice about things that matter to them. The other was that having your own culture, beliefs and religion helps to make you who you are.

To be cared for by my own parents unless that isn’t in my best interests
The views of children and young people in our survey are particularly important on this right, because many of them were not living with their own parents. Reasons given for voting for this right were that being cared for by your own parents usually means being loved and cared for, and that they are your family and family is important. Some, though, wrote that it is not always
good to be cared for by your own parents if they don’t actually care properly for you, which makes the second part of this right very important for many children. A few told us that this right is important because there is a responsibility on parents to care for their children.

**To enjoy myself now, as well as to prepare for the future**

This new right, which came from children and young people themselves in our past discussions with them, was seen by the people who voted for it in this survey as simply putting forward two basic rights about childhood and youth. Those voting for this new right said they had done so because children and young people should definitely be able to enjoy their lives, and that they also needed to be preparing for the future. Some told us they thought that life is too short not to do both these things when you are young. Others said that doing both these things made for a better life and more happiness.

**To be told about my past life if and when I wish to know**

This right was especially important to people who had been through major problems, changes and moves in their lives, and the top reason for voting for it was so that each person could know more what they had been through in the past. As some put it, this was a right to know your own ‘life story’, which, as others said, is a part of you. Another reason given was that for those no longer living with their own birth family, this right is important to make sure they can know about their own family. A few told us that being able to find out more about your past life can be important to your well-being.

**To be treated as an individual, not as one of a group of children**

One major group of reasons was given for voting for this right: that everyone has a unique identity as an individual, everyone is not the same, and everyone has different needs and their own life to live. Others wrote that stereotyping people in groups is wrong. Some wrote that everyone being treated as an individual would help people to get equal treatment.

**To give my views about things that affect me and have my views make a difference if I am old enough**

The one big reason for voting for this as a right was to make sure that each person can have their own say and opinion. Some said this was important because it affects the person’s life, and because it has an impact on decisions that affect them. Some said, though, that children’s views should make a difference to things that affect them at any age.

**To keep and use my own possessions**

There were two main reasons for voting for this right. The top one was that there should be a right to do this if something is personal to the child. As some put it, it should be a right because ‘it is mine’. The other was that this right was needed in order to keep one’s own possessions safe. Some wrote to us that some possessions may be very special to the person who owns them, and some might be part of someone’s identity. Others told us that it is important to be able to call some things your own.

**‘Right to go to school so you can learn stuff’**
To make and keep my own friends
Children who voted for this right gave three very different main reasons. First, and the top reason, was that making friends was an area where everyone should have freedom of choice. Second came the reason that people have a basic need to have friends. Third, we heard that this right would, like some others, help children to learn to socialise and develop social skills which everyone needs. Some other reasons given were that people need to have others they can trust, that making friends avoids loneliness, that having friends makes it more possible to enjoy activities and have fun, and that our friends help to make us who we are.

To have my views, wishes, worries and feelings asked about and thought about when people decide things for me, whatever age I am
One reason for voting for this right stood out, and that was that it gives people a say in their lives. Some said this meant making important decisions better, and others that everyone should have a say in their own lives because ‘it’s your life’.

To make decisions for myself if I understand enough, whatever age I am
Children who voted for this right said, as had been said about some other rights, that it is important to give children a say in their lives, and that children should be allowed to make decisions for themselves once they can do that. Another main reason given, again, as with other rights, was that making their own decisions is important because ‘it’s my life’. Some said that making decisions for themselves when they can helps children to grow and become independent.

To do hobbies I want to do
Votes were given to this right because it would help people to enjoy life, to make choices, and to do things they like. Some also wrote that this is part of learning and achieving, and others that it would help children and young people keep fit and active.

Always to get the help the law says I should
Children told us they had voted for this new right because it would help to make sure they actually get all the help the law says they should be getting; because if the law says someone should have something, then they should have a right to have it; and because whatever the law says people should have is an entitlement.

People looking after me should always do what is in my best interests
Many different reasons were given for supporting this right, but no one reason came far ahead of the others. The most common reasons given were that this right should help to make sure that children are cared for properly, and are happy and safe. Some also said that this is a carer’s responsibility, so it should be a child’s right.

To be treated well and fairly if I have broken the law
Three main reasons were given for voting for this right. The top one was that it is important for everyone to be treated fairly and equally. Next came the idea that this right makes it more likely that people will learn from their mistakes. The third reason was that it is part of how justice should be carried out. Some wrote that it is important that everyone should be treated ‘like a human’ or ‘with dignity’.

To speak in my own language
Two main reasons were given for supporting this right. One was that being able to speak in your own language can be important to being able to understand other people, and to be understood by them. The other was that speaking in your own language is a part of being who you are. Some also wrote that speaking in your own language supported different cultures.
To read books and get information in other ways too

The one reason that was by far the most usual one given by those who voted for this right was that it is needed to be able to learn and get knowledge. A second top reason was that this right has to be there if children and young people are to be educated.

To get information from other people

Children and young people gave us three main reasons for voting for this right. Top was that this right has to be there if children are going to be informed about things they need to know. The second, linked to the first, was that all children and young people need to learn things from other people. The third was a very different reason: getting information from other people has to happen if people are to help each other.

Overall...

Some children and young people told us they had voted for a particular right on the list simply because they thought it was ‘just a right’ that everyone should have. This reason came up for every right on the list. Some children saw some things as obvious and basic rights that didn’t need any other reasons for them. Every right on the list had some people who supported it in this way as an ‘obvious right’.

When we studied the reasons given for voting for different rights, we also found that children and young people supported some things on the list because they were needed as part of another right. There seemed to be some very big rights that children and young people saw as so obvious that anything that was a part of those big rights would get votes. Looking at the reasons children and young people gave us for voting in the way they did, we identified nine of these big rights (not in any particular order).

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The nine big rights

- The right to be safe from harm
- The right to well-being
- The right to be alive and well
- The right to learning and education
- The right to enjoy life
- The right to be oneself
- The right of all people to be treated equally and fairly
- The right to socialise with other people
- The right to have a say in one’s own life

The idea of ‘well-being’ was one that we had asked about in a different part of our survey. We said that ‘well-being’, according to the dictionary, means being ‘comfortable, healthy and happy’. When we asked children and young people what they thought might make somebody feel like that, the most common answers were mainly things already on the list of children’s rights we had used for the voting.

From the reasons children and young people gave us for supporting various rights on the list, these nine big rights deserve to be seriously considered for any future Act, Bill or Charter about rights and responsibilities.

These big rights came from the survey, but in our discussion groups we heard many much more detailed examples of all of the rights on the voting list. One special school group talked about the ‘right to go to school so you can learn stuff’. They suggested the right to play with your own things; to be allowed to go outside, but only when it is safe; the right to have water and food; the right to read a book; and the right to play. They also said they thought there should be a right to have money.
Children’s proposals for new rights

After children had voted on the list of rights from the Human Rights Act, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, and the 10 additional rights other children had asked for during our other consultations, we asked whether there were any other rights that the children and young people wanted to put forward. We received 1,243 answers to this question.

**The right to have a say**

The most usual proposal was the **right to have a say**, which came from 175 children. At first we wondered why children and young people had made this proposal as if it was a new one, because we had already put rights about being consulted and having a say in our list of rights for the vote. But, from discussions with our focus groups, it looks as if those children and young people were asking for more of a right to have a say in decisions about their lives than they were getting so far.

It is important to say that the very great majority of the proposals written to us in answering this question were **not putting forward entirely new rights, but were very close to rights that were already on our voting list**. Some were exactly the same, others were examples of a right already on the list. There were no new rights that were proposed by more than one in 10 children answering this question, which is the percentage we usually use when deciding that there is a strong view on something coming out of one of our surveys.

**Individual wishes**

After ‘having a say’, the next biggest group of proposals for new rights was about **particular things that individual children wanted**. Some of these were, a bit like ‘having a say’, rights that were already on the list, but which individual children wanted to work better for them. Others were particular activities that individual children wanted to be allowed to do. These did include things like smoking and taking drugs. No particular activities stood out because they came from large numbers of children, though. Yet others were to do with having particular amounts of pocket money or allowances. Sixty-four children made proposals about pocket money or allowances.

**A right to be treated equally and fairly**

The next most frequent proposal was the right to be treated equally and fairly with other people. That came from 73 children and young people. This was not one of the rights we had already listed, but it came out as one of the big rights that we found children believed in when we studied the reasons for the way they voted for the rights on our list.

**A right to choose carers**

Just one other proposal came from over 50 children, and that was that those in care should have the right to have a choice of who their carers are. Fifty-one children made that proposal. However, this didn’t add up to more than one in 10 of the people answering our survey question.
In our discussion groups, a number of new rights were suggested. One group at a special school suggested that children should have a ‘right to be naughty’. They also gave some examples of a general ‘right to be what you want to be’, which included ‘dress how you want’ and ‘don’t do stuff you don’t want to do’. Another group put the same right a different way: the right ‘to live your life’.

Some children and young people in our groups gave examples of things that they wished they had a right to have or to do. Some were things like ‘get more money’ and ‘not to do any work again’. Some children wished for very practical things, like ‘eat what you want rather than what other people put in front of you’, and a ‘right to have wireless’. One answer to one of our Widget symbol questionnaires (rather than from a discussion group) was that children should have the right to ‘football, games and watching Shrek’.

Other proposals from discussion groups were major things like ‘have suitable homes and clothing’, ‘have good food to eat’, and ‘make complaints and suggestions’. One group put forward a very basic right – ‘the right to sleep’. Another group went beyond the responsibility to try to get a job, and thought there should be a right to have a job. On privacy, one group said there should be a right to ‘have your own space when you want to be on your own, not people following or watching you’.

A young person in one group summed up how the group felt about everyone needing to have some very basic rights, but how in their experience most of these things always happened anyway: ‘Eating is probably a right. I don’t know about rights because it is life.’

Two groups discussed ways of making children and young people aware of their rights and responsibilities. Their ideas included teaching about rights and responsibilities more in school; putting information on Facebook; putting information on television; and ‘advertising the responsibilities one by one – new one each day’. Leaflets could be put in schools and libraries, though they would need to be colourful and attractive to make young people likely to read them. Another group gave us an example of how sometimes people are told about their rights already: ‘At boarding school when you come here you have certain rights; these are set out in a book.’
What ‘well-being’ means to children

Our final questions were to find out children’s views on the idea of ‘well-being’. We told them that the dictionary says that well-being means being ‘comfortable, healthy and happy’. On our last question card, we asked children and young people what they thought was important for them to feel like that. We did not suggest any answers ourselves. Each person could give up to three answers. We received 3,464 answers from the 1,193 people who answered the question.

The top 10 ideas on what gives children and young people ‘well-being’, according to the 1,193 who contributed their views, were:

- being healthy (44%)
- feeling loved (24%)
- having a home (23%)
- enjoying activities and having fun (21%)
- feeling happy (19%)
- being cared for (17%)
- being safe (17%)
- having a family (14%)
- having friends (13%)
- being supported (11%).

The percentages in brackets are the percentages of children answering the question who gave each answer. The top answer, being healthy (which included having a healthy diet to eat), came far ahead of the other answers. Being able to stay healthy is a big part of what children see as ‘well-being’ for themselves. One child wrote that for them, well-being meant ‘healthy food and going to the doctor when you’re not feeling very well’.

Some children wrote more about some of their answers. Examples of what well-being means to some individual children are: ‘a home which they look forward to going to every night’; ‘a nice good place to play; less health and safety’; ‘relaxing places to live, not in council houses on the back streets of dodgy towns’; ‘to know that you can always talk to someone about your problems or feelings’; and being ‘able to do what they want to do once in a while’ with ‘chances to mess around but with a limit’. To one child, well-being meant ‘to have a hug sometimes when I feel low or unhappy’.

On having a say in decisions about their lives, one young person said that for them, well-being meant that ‘future plans for their life would agree with what they want, in reason’. As we have heard, being given information goes along with having a say in things: ‘Children like to ask a lot of questions – they like knowing the answer as well.’

For one person, having well-being means that children will ‘be able to relax and enjoy themselves rather than being constantly afraid or nervous about the situation they are in’. One child told us that well-being meant having a good future, as well as being OK now – ‘being able to know that there will be more nice things to come’.

‘Be able to relax and enjoy themselves rather than being constantly afraid or nervous about the situation they are in’
As well as asking children what makes up well-being, we asked children to **tell us if there was anything that adults needed to stop doing if children were to have well-being.** Again, we did not suggest any answers. We had 1,549 answers, from 861 children.

**Fifteen per cent of the children who answered said there was nothing they thought adults needed to stop doing to help children experience well-being.** One person said, ‘In many cases I think the role of adults in children’s life is not strong enough, rather than too overbearing.’ There were only four answers that came from more than one in 10 of the children who answered the question, and three of these were to do with ill treatment of children. Twenty per cent said that adults stopping bad treatment would help them achieve well-being, 16% said that certain adults needed to stop being bad carers and 12% said that abuse of children needed to stop. The one top answer that was not about ill treatment was that adults could help children and young people to achieve well-being by stopping telling them what to do so much. Fourteen per cent gave this answer. The next most frequent answer, which came from 9% of the children who answered our question and so did not quite make the ‘one in 10 children’ level, was that adults should stop smoking: ‘Adults should stop smoking because it influences young people to do it and damages their health.’

Some examples of more points made by individual children were: ‘adults should stop children from being in a nasty environment where they could easily be abused’; adults should stop ‘shouting and fighting between each other’; ‘adults should spend an amount of time with their children to make them feel more close to their parents’; adults should stop ‘destroying children’s lives by making bad decisions and making their children upset’; and adults should not ‘look bored when I am talking about what is important to me’. One young person was concerned that the media have a negative view of children and young people which damages their well-being: ‘All of the negative media about teenagers and children – it’s not only children/teenagers that get drunk on the street or fall pregnant without getting married.’

Three final quotes give three very different analyses of how adults could avoid damaging children’s well-being.

- ‘**They should stop abuse and discrimination to children, just because they are kids, and not exploit our weaknesses. We are not fully grown up and do not have as much experience in the world, but we do understand the way it works too**’

- ‘**They should stop comparing their children to them or other people, putting so much pressure on us to be perfect and always telling us what to do all the time without explaining why you have to do it**’

- ‘**They should stop pushing their children to the parents’ goals, because they can’t always make it to them**’
Conclusion

Having sought the views of children and young people across the remit of the Children’s Rights Director, it is clear that there are no major new rights proposed by the children we consulted to add to those listed already in our survey from the Human Rights Act, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, and rights that had emerged from previous consultations with children in residential schools and colleges, in care or receiving social care support. From their reasons for supporting a number of existing rights, however, it is clear that these children and young people saw people being treated equally and fairly as a major right in itself. Consideration should be given to including this right as a clear separate statement in any future Act, Bill or Charter of Rights and Responsibilities.

The children we consulted are overall in favour of having one list bringing together both rights and responsibilities in one place.

They had a clear view of what responsibilities children should have. These included: taking responsibility, when able to do so, for one’s own actions, safety, health and hygiene; looking after oneself; making use of the education that children saw as a right; using the right to have a say by actually giving their opinions; taking responsibility for looking after other people; carrying out tasks where they live and taking responsibility for the wider environment too.

Any future UK Act, Bill or Charter of Rights and Responsibilities needs to take on board that the children and young people who gave us their views included in their top 10 priorities the existing Human Rights Act and United Nations Convention rights of being protected from abuse; having an education; being helped to keep alive and well; not suffering discrimination; not being treated or punished in a cruel or demeaning way; disabled children being given special help; and privacy and confidentiality of written and electronic communications. Any future Act, Bill or Charter of Rights and Responsibilities also needs to take note that the children added in this top 10 two new rights that had come from our other consultations with children: the right not to be bullied, and the right to keep in touch with parents, grandparents, brothers and sisters.
Last words

The final words in this report go to these young people’s views.

‘We should have the right to take responsibility’

‘All children should have the responsibility to be their own person, to not have to be forced under other people’s views about life, obviously to follow the law and to be well-mannered, but they should have the responsibility to grow up as themselves’

‘Some adults can be too busy to listen to what kids want to say – sometimes kids say some amazingly influential and important things because they see the world from a different perspective’

‘It is important to have input from the younger members of the population’
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