Empowered and effective decision making:
Consultation response report

Executive summary
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Empowered and Effective Decision Making is an action research project, funded by the Scottish Government, and is a partnership between Capability Scotland and the Centre for Research on Families and Relationships (CRFR), a cross-university centre based at The University of Edinburgh. The full report sets out the aims of the project, and reports on initial consultations with young people, families and professionals.

Background

Empowered and effective decision-making is an action research project that aims to understand when and why children and young people with disabilities feel empowered to make their own decisions.

Phase one consulted with 17 young people age 12-16 years, 18 staff and 8 parents across four diverse schools to identify approaches and strategies that may help young people make informed and effective decisions.

Decision-making contexts

Young people were involved in a number of decisions including everyday decisions about washing, eating and dressing, decisions about leisure activities, their health and therapy sessions, and decisions within the school day.

Decision-making strategies

Communication methods were a key feature of involvement in decision making for some young people, and a range of these are described in the full report.

Practitioners and parents employ a number of tailored strategies to enable young people to make decisions including goal setting, feedback forms, developing key signs, and trying out communication methods for themselves.

Particular strategies are used with young people with autism, including establishing routine, clear systems for choices between options, and a good lead in time for new activities.
What helps young people make effective decisions?

- Parents and practitioners having an **attitude** that young people should be involved in decision-making
- **Being familiar** with young people, their methods of communication, and ways of being can help with interpretation of choices
- A level of **expertise** amongst staff that enables young people to communicate their choices well
- **Good communication networks** between those who care for and support young people
- **Ongoing training** in communications methods and approaches
- Having a **high staff ratio** to enable enough time to facilitate effective decision-making
- Suitable **equipment** especially technology and support aids
- Adequate **financial resources** for the staffing and equipment
- Using a **diverse range of tools and strategies**

What hinders young people making effective decisions?

- Cognitive ability can sometimes impair decision-making
- Parents being over-protective of their children in terms of what they might do
- Lack of awareness in society about the needs of disabled young people
- Young people’s reticence and lack of confidence

Next steps

These findings will be taken forward into phase two of the project which will work closely with a few young people to explore and expand the range of decisions they make in everyday life through action research.

Emergent learning gathered through the action research on what tools strategies and approaches work well will be disseminated with partners and stakeholders throughout the country.
This document, along with the full Consultation Response Report and Literature Review as well as further information on the full action research project commissioned by the Scottish Government can be obtained by contacting Eric Mitchell, Policy Projects Manager, Capability Scotland on eric.mitchell@capability-scotland.org.uk or 0131 347 1077. Alternative formats, including Easy Read, are available on request.

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