

Ambition to Action: a summary report

March '22



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Background

Policy and legislation on children in Wales is underpinned by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1989). The Rights of Children and Young Persons (Wales) Measure 2011, the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 and the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 establish duties on public authorities that contribute toward the realisation of children's rights. A children's rights approach is consistent with these duties and will help public bodies to meet their statutory duties.

In March 2017, [The Right Way: A Children's Rights Approach in Wales](#) (hereafter referred to as TRW) was published by the Children's Commissioner for Wales (CCfW). It is a principled framework for working with children, grounded in the UNCRC and was created with expert advice from the Wales Observatory on Human Rights of Children and Young People. TRW aims to help organisations in the private and public sectors give effect to children's rights, providing guidance and practical help on a children's rights approach to planning and delivering services for children.



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Aims

This evaluation aims to understand:

1. What work has been done to achieve the desired goal of TRW?
2. What has worked well and what have been the challenges in embedding TRW approach?
3. What has changed as a result of embedding TRW approach? How much of this change is due to TRW? What else has led to change?
4. What is needed to make TRW sustainable?

The evaluation report will determine how successful the support of the Children's Commissioner for Wales and her team has been for public bodies in adopting a children's rights approach. The report will also identify good practice, challenges that people have experienced along the way and provide recommendations about how the Commissioner's office can help overcome the issues in the future, so that many more organisations prioritise embedding of rights-based approaches that deliver real changes in children's everyday quality of life and equal chances to fulfil their potential.



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Methods

This study was done in 3 parts:

PART 1 - Examination of documents that highlighted work done in the period 2017-21 to embed a children's rights approach. These documents include Annual Reports, web content such as policy recommendation updates, and TRW case studies and documentation provided by the Commissioner's team.

PART 2 - An online survey aimed at those who have worked with the Commissioner's team to, in some way, embed TRW.

PART 3 - Facilitation of focus groups with survey participants to follow up and speak in more depth about their use and experience of TRW.

30 organisations participated in the survey and 22 in Focus Groups.



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Findings

What work has been done to achieve the desired goal of TRW?

There is a plethora of work that goes on within the Commissioner's team in implementing TRW principles as well as the work undertaken by the team to support others to implement the principles. The following section begins by outlining the work within the organisation to implement the principles, followed by a summary of the organisation's actions in supporting others to embed TRW.

INTERNAL work of CCfW as an organisation to implement TRW in own work

Embedding
<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Strategic Planning Policy and Strategic Plan are built around children's rights.○ All job descriptions have explicit reference to children's rights.○ A dedicated Participation Team exists to promote and implement projects that explicitly aim to listen to children and young people.
Equality and Non-discrimination
<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Investigation and Advice (I&A) Team exist to support children, young people and their families to have equitable access to their rights, supporting people who may not be able to, or are marginalised from doing so by themselves.○ Equalities Impact Assessment screening undertaken for all projects during early planning, with full Assessments taking place where screening dictates this.○ Strategic Equality Plan, a comprehensive plan including a requirement on all project managers to undertake a full Equality Impact Assessment of their work.
Empowerment
<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Communications work is focused on increasing awareness of children's rights and the role of the Commissioner, so that children themselves have access to information which enables them to understand and exercise their rights.○ Widgit Licensing and Training for staff: Widgit symbols can help users of all ages and abilities and backgrounds who have difficulty with text or communication in a wide variety of settings. A licence has been purchased and staff have received training on the software to enable in-house production of accessible, bilingual materials.○ Young People's Advisory panel: Established in 2016, the panel is made up of 16 — 35 members of children and young people between the ages of 11 to 18. This advisory panel holds the Commissioner and her office to account on the delivery of their three year and annual work plans.○ The creation of a suite of tailored materials to promote and encourage public bodies across Wales to take a children's rights approach.



Participation

- Every member of staff team has a responsibility to engage with children and young people in all four corners of Wales.
- A commitment to make sure all work with children and young people is inclusive and accessible is clear in reports and policy.

In the period 2020/2021 (significant as during lockdown):

Commissioner continued to engage with young people across Wales at online events, workshops and meetings

- Gathered the views of 44,000 children and young people across Wales through [‘Coronavirus and Me’](#) surveys
- Secured nearly 10,000 votes in the country’s first [parallel Senedd election](#) for 11-15 year olds.
- Hosted online children’s rights lessons for 864 children and young people
- Engaged with 15,504 children and young people across Wales at events, workshops and meetings
- Worked with 95 secondary schools across Wales as part of [Student Ambassador scheme](#).
- Increased Super Ambassador membership to 606 primary schools across Wales
- In 2018, asked almost 7000 children and young people about whether they felt they were getting all of their rights. It led to further research with pupils and teachers in secondary schools about how participation worked in their schools and what challenges there are in ensuring young people can really take part in decision making. In July 2021, a report ([‘Amplify’](#)) and a suite of resources were published with findings of the research and information about how to improve and value participation of young people and how young people could empower themselves to drive change and take action ([‘Make a Difference’](#)).
- Held focus groups with 55 young people across Wales in a [‘listening day’](#) in November to assess the impact of the October ‘firebreak’ restrictions in Wales

In the remaining period (2017-2019):

- Engaged with over 42,408 children and young people across Wales at events, workshops and meetings.
- Engaged the views of 2,000 children about bullying to develop [‘Sam’s Story’](#).
- Secured responses from 13,796 children in the [TRW education surveys](#).
- Consulted with 10,000 children and young people to inform the most recent three-year plan.

Accountability

- Advisory panels of young people provide strategic support to the Commissioner and the team and plans are afoot to ensure the Commissioner becomes accountable to the democratically elected Senedd Ieuenctid (Youth Parliament) for Wales.
 - Progress made against strategic plan is published in Annual Report as is an assessment of how CCfW is performing against the principles of TRW is also included in each Annual Report
 - Information about how to complain about the organisation is available in an accessible format on the Commissioner’s website.



CCFW engagement with EXTERNAL organisations on TRW principles

Embedding

- **Influencing International, National and Local Government e.g.** Welsh Government has been supported to use TRW as its basis for its new Children's Rights Scheme.
- **Sector Specific Support:**

Education - [The Right Way Education](#) guidance has contributed to the development of education policy in Wales in the following ways:

- The guidance is referenced, and the five principles are outlined in the statutory Additional Learning Needs Code for Wales 2021.
- The guidance is referenced, and the five principles are outlined in the statutory safeguarding guidance for education settings, Keeping Learners Safe 2020
- The guidance is referenced, and the five principles are outlined in the statutory Framework for embedding a whole school approach to mental health and wellbeing 2021
- The guidance is referenced in the Welsh Government statutory anti-bullying guidance for education settings, Rights, Respect and Equity 2019

Youth Justice:

- Annual seminars have been developed in collaboration with the Youth Justice and Health sector(s). The seminars provide an opportunity for professionals to share and inspire good practice in respect of embedding a children's rights-based approach.
- **HMP Parc:** support to embed children's rights in their work.
- **Hillside Secure Children's Home:** a number of children's rights workshops for staff (Education and Operational) working in Hillside Secure Children's Home have been facilitated to support the institution to embed rights throughout their operations and practice.

Health: Since 2018, annual health seminars have been held in conjunction with Public Health Wales. All health boards and trusts in Wales attended to come together to discuss children's rights in health settings, report on their progress and to share ideas and learning. Tailored support has also been offered and includes:

- Development of a children's rights charters/pledges in Swansea Bay health board, Cardiff & Vale University Health Board, Cwm Taf Morgannwg Health Board, Hywel Dda University Health Board, Aneurin Bevan University health Board, and Powys Teaching Health Board.
- Support to establish Health Youth Boards in Cardiff & Vale University Health Board, Hywel Dda University Health Board,

Public Health Wales: supported to consult with children and young people in Wales to co-produce Young Person's Annual Quality Statements (for both younger and older children) alongside their Annual Reports. They have led to Public Health Youth Summits, feedback from which has led to a Young Ambassadors programme. This programme includes offering 3 four-week internship opportunities at Public Health Wales.

Police: Work with all police forces to encourage a rights-based approach. Work with South Wales Police to develop a charter and an action plan to embed TRW. Work with Dyfed Powys to deliver training around the UNCRC and TRW which has led to development of a charter and further training.



The Welsh Ambulance Services Trust: supported to undertake an engagement exercise asking children and young people how they felt the Trust could improve its interactions with children and young people. This has led to commitment to a series of promises (co-produced with children) which are aimed at being more responsive to children and young people's needs, and which includes using language more appropriate to age and understanding.

Environment: Natural Resources Wales has been supported to consider how a children's rights approach fits within their organisation structure. Work with groups in the school and community has led to the development of their own Rights Charter.

Local Authorities:

- **Wrexham Council:** supported to pilot embed TRW approach into social care and education work, leading to the development of the Matrix self-assessment tool. Successes in this pilot also include development of a one-stop-shop' approach to receiving comments, compliments and complaints about any service offered by the Local Authority from children and young people.
- **Pembrokeshire Council:** workshop with Council members with a focus on poverty and how The Right Way principles can support council members to consider children and young people living in poverty through a children's rights lens, this included a practical workshop around the principles and the Commissioner's poverty resource, '[Check with Ceri](#)'.
- **Monmouthshire Council:** developed a Participation Strategy which complements and fits within principles of TRW
- **Swansea Council:** supported to integrate TRW into children's Rights Training, to embed TRW and the centre point of their Children's Rights Scheme and supported to pilot TRW in education as a way of measuring a rights-based approach in school settings.

Sport:

- **Sport Wales:** continued support to help them use the self-assessment matrix to identify what work they already are doing to support Children's rights and consider any opportunities they can take to continue to map ways forward.
- **Welsh Sports Association:** training on The Right Way Principles in Sport Settings

Training for staff to understand, promote and embed children's rights:

Examples of children's rights training for staff during the period 2017-2021 include:

- **South Wales Police:** TRW training delivered to South Wales Police's Gold command: its senior police leaders. This led to commitment to embedding a Children's Rights Approach in their work, and work with the force and pupils from Pentrehafod School and Hillside Secure children's Home to develop a children's charter.
- Training for police cadet hub led to introduction of the role of the Commissioner and UNCRC and subsequent support in thinking about The Right Way in their work.
- **Dyfed Powys Police:** TRW training for police who champion the work of children in the force, with specific inclusion of how to embed a children's rights approach more sustainably in the future ongoing training of police officers.
- **Education Consortia:** TRW train the trainer events delivered to EAS education consortia leads, leading to the development and pilot of a TRW teacher training module with over 30 teachers and cascaded this to all consortia health and wellbeing leads.
- **University of Newport:** TRW training for youth work students around role of Commissioner and UNCRC.



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- **Hywel Dda training:** for people championing youth involvement
- **EYST:** Training for EYST participation staff team on UNCRC and TRW

Workshops with civil servants:

- ‘Children’s Rights in Policy in Wales’ — highlighted how each of TRW principles applied through the policy process. **35 officials** from across Welsh Government (WG) departments signed up for the session which involved lots of interactive discussion about how to ensure children’s rights through the policy process.
- Training session on Children’s Rights, sharing results from our Coronavirus and Me survey 2021 with **70 WG officials**. This session focus on how findings could inform ongoing decision making and how WG could ensure that children’s rights are considered in ongoing pandemic response.
- Follow up training session with **over 150 Welsh Government staff** on children’s rights and Coronavirus survey findings took place.
- Training session held for Welsh Government’s Education directorate on The Right Way Principles.

Development of specific TRW training resources

[Undergraduate resources](#) have been developed to enable students to consider how children’s rights can help them in their future work. Three lectures/lesson plans for university and college students introduce children’s rights and the work of the Office of the Children’s Commissioner.

[TRW teacher training](#) modules have also been produced.

Equality and Non-Discrimination

Anti-Bullying Work: In 2016, over 2,000 children and young people shared their experiences of bullying through a Special Mission, the results of which we included in our report, ‘[Sam’s Story](#)’. Included within that report were a series of recommendations for Welsh Government and others — influencing the 2019 Government launch of new anti-bullying guidance, Rights, Respect and Equity.

Empowerment

Ambassador schemes: enable children and young people to become ambassadors for children’s rights and the Commissioner in their schools and communities. To date, 606 primary schools and 95 secondary schools are engaged in the Ambassador Scheme. In 2020 alone, 475 pupils received training to implement the Ambassador scheme in their School by becoming Rights Ambassadors.

Make A Difference — A Young Person’s Guide to Taking Action: A resource developed to enable young people make a difference for themselves.

Participation

- **Ambassador schemes:** support schools and community groups to listen to and involve children and young people.
- **Coronavirus and Me surveys:** conducted in partnership with Welsh Government enabled the government to listen to thousands of children about their pandemic experiences; these were substantially reflected in subsequent children’s rights impact assessments and pandemic-related decisions by the government. Tailored reports were also distributed to every local authority during the pandemic to enable them to consider children and young people’s views in local decision-making.
- **Supporting the development of participation strategies and young people’s forums:** achieved via seminars or bespoke engagement for organisations including Qualifications Wales and Public Health Wales.



Accountability

CCfW has done lots of work to support organisations to give thought to how they hold themselves to account, particularly in offering bespoke support during the Pandemic. Examples include:

- Supporting Qualifications Wales and Welsh Government with their communications of their decisions for children.
- Holding scrutiny and advice sessions for ministers with young people
- Working with Estyn on engaging young people in discussing sensitive topics and feeding back to them outcomes.

What has worked well and what have been the challenges in embedding TRW approach?

“TRW is a strengths-based approach — it gives people the tools to work in the right way and wherever you work, it can be used to underpin a universal, ethical approach to children— but it needs a more consistent offer and roll out nationally”.

Opportunities

- Unanimously participants worked in large and complex organisations where a number of legislative directives, policies and agendas guided their work. In almost all cases, these were also services that were not solely aimed at children and young people but serve the wider population. Whilst this has posed many challenges (see below), participants unanimously felt that TRW has the potential to provide a **consistent and common approach to rights**, in which all their work could be demonstrated. For the participants involved, TRW provides a welcomed framework for measuring rights-based practice and putting action to the pledges and promises that are made with good intention in action.
- All noted the **credibility that the badge of the Commissioner brings** with TRW. This was welcomed in gaining senior buy-in.
- Overwhelmingly the opportunities **TRW allows for collaboration were celebrated**. In all sectors requests were made for more opportunities to come together, either at seminars or forums. These requests were made for inter-sector forums and cross-sector opportunities.
- **Practical support to understand and implement TRW** was welcomed at every point.

Challenges

- Focus during the **pandemic** has been to keep children alive, safe, healthy, and educated. For many participants, their roles were changed to address the needs of their organisation during Covid, and in the main the focus on embedding rights-based approaches was limited. A refresh of knowledge and understanding of TRW is necessary.
- For every participant, **competing demands** such as political pressures, legislation, the pandemic, crime rates are regarded as the ‘driving factors’ that direct work, over and above rights. That is not to say rights are not important or that they are not realised by children through the achievement of these other factors, but it was



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noted by participants that explicit incorporation of TRW and rights-based approaches can be difficult to 'sell'. Work to show how these perceived competing demands fit into TRW principles is 'critical' to **gaining senior buy-in**.

- Unanimously, participants identified as having a lead role in children's rights in their organisations and were without doubt, willing, motivated, and passionate to work with children and young people and embed children's rights-based approaches in practice. However, the participant's position with their organisation, **ability to influence decision making and seniority played an important role in the extent of challenges they faced with TRW**, particularly in terms of embedding and accountability. There appears to be a correlation between authority to influence policy and practice within an organisation and ability to embed TRW. Widely participants felt that **formally appointed leads** need to be those with responsibility for directing policy and planning, to permeate all aspects of an organisations work. Without this embedding TRW and holding people to account to it felt substantially more difficult, and often unachievable on whole service/organisation scale.
- A key theme in challenges was **lack of governance**, i.e., a lack of reinforcement of TRW as a common framework for embedding rights at a national level. While participants recognised and utilised many different initiatives and ways of realising children's rights in practice, commonly participants urged a recognition that TRW can act as overarching framework which is broad enough for other work to fit into it. Participants were keen for provision of clear direction and responsibility for supporting public bodies to embed rights, i.e., TRW in policy and practice frameworks. This includes:
 - A clear national commitment to TRW, giving it the 'teeth' required for senior buy-in within organisations
 - Clear communication to all staff working with children and young people that they can/should use TRW to influence their work.
 - Ensuring children's rights are included within Public Services Boards (PSB) recovery plans and other policies that influence the operational delivery of services for children, e.g., local school curricula and Police and Crime Plans
 - Greater accountability for embedding TRW principles in government funded work: How rights are embedded should be integrated into the reporting, funding applications and other processes for ensuring accountability at a Welsh Government level.
- **Participation** was by far the most commonly used principle with a wealth of good practice taking place, but often through the good will or under resourced individuals. For sectors not bound by the statutory participation duty set out within the Child and Families (Wales) Measure 2010, they viewed such a mandate as a positive one, in encouraging embedding participation, and ensuring accountability.
- Inextricably linked to the points above is **lack of understanding** (particularly amongst those who do not work directly with children and young people); of children's rights in general, of TRW, how to embed a children's rights-based approach and the strategic benefits of doing so and, of participation and effective and meaningful engagement of children and young people:
 - How and where participants accessed children's rights training varied greatly. Participants recognised inconsistency in content and availability of training, posing challenges in access to it, and understanding of children's rights generally. **Participants called for a consistent and mandatory programme of Children's Rights workforce development focussing on understanding the UNCRC and embedding rights in practice. This should include training opportunities related to embedding TRW principles, and using TRW resources, i.e., the Matrix and CRIA**
 - TRW can provide a roadmap for complex organisations to embed children's rights but a lack of understanding of how to implement TRW and the benefits of it (that speak to strategic decision makers) is a barrier, i.e., understanding how TRW contributes to fulfilling legislative requirements. **Development of good**



practice case studies relating to the benefits of embedding TRW principles — as a way of encouraging buy-in at a senior level is required.

- A programme of **targeted TRW training at senior decision makers**, with explicit inclusion of legislative duties linked to TRW would be useful.
- On several occasions in several sectors, a need for participation guides was raised. The ability to understand the engagement needs of children and young people was deemed a significant barrier. **Support specifically for those who work in services that are not exclusively child-focused, but whose business affects children is required.**

What has changed as a result of embedding TRW approach? How much of this change is due to TRW? What else has led to change?

Unanimously participants expressed care, a willingness and motivation to further the pursuit of realising children's rights (most commonly participation) in their work, and that of their organisation. What is also clear is that for participants involved in this study who use TRW, they are advocates of the resource, understand its benefits and are keen to see directive that would ensure more robust use of it in Wales. For most it was the strategic framework they were looking for to turn the complex rhetoric of rights into reality for children, to turn ambition in action, and the work done to achieve this has been clear throughout this research.

However, in almost all cases, with exception of those involved in specific project or pilot work with Commissioner's Office, motivation to use TRW was down to chance, encountering TRW in the pursuit of furthering that work.

Competing demands such as the 'driving factors' that direct work, over and above rights cannot be ignored. Legislation and agendas of senior and political officers were key factors in this, emphasising the need to link TRW with those drivers.

Widely, in matters pertaining to children's rights, when support is needed, practitioners are aware of the office of the Children's Commissioner, know how to, and are able to access them for support. What is less clear is how well promoted TRW is, and whether people/services/organisations make use of the resource, without initial contact or support with the Office and its officers. It is also unclear whether those whose main focus is not children's rights would make use of this without further promotion or 'selling of the resource'. More exploration with services not in receipt of support would shed light on this.

What is needed to make TRW sustainable?

The future needs of participants from the Office of the Children's Commissioner to make TRW sustainable are:

Advocacy: wider promotion of TRW, with specific advocacy of the strategic benefits of embedding its principles.

Seniority: Advocacy of children's rights and resources to embed them comes with the 'clout' required to encourage critical senior buy-in when advocated by the Commissioner.

Lobbying: Lobbying senior leaders, including Welsh Government to incorporate TRW into the policies and planning.



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Scrutiny: Formalised scrutiny of organisations using TRW. Annual check-ins of progress using matrix tool. Scrutiny of use of TRW principles in governing policies and plans, e.g., Police and Crime Plans and school curricula.

Training: Development of a co-ordinated roll out of TRW training opportunities including incorporation of matrix and CRIA support and clear links to how embedding TRW work to achieving the legislative duties placed on organisations in respect of children and young people.



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Recommendations

Based on the findings within this study, it is recommended:

Resources and Support

- To continue to promote and encourage TRW to public services, providing the resources and support that already exist as these deemed useful and welcome.
- To review and update associated resources on the website in relation to TRW including:
 - Good practice case studies, based on the work discussed in this study
 - Development of specific resources focussed on embedding and accountability, e.g., case studies focussing on use and challenges of applying the Matrix or CRIA in practice.
 - Development of specific resources for strategic leaders linked to legislative requirements for children and young people.
 - Explore an online matrix that can be completed and saved, one principle at a time, and returned to plot progress.
 - Explore the development or refresh of participation guides.

Advocacy and communication

- Disseminate refreshed communication of TRW, resources available and the benefits of using the resource as organisations recover from the pandemic.
- Targeted communication to senior leaders that demonstrates how working to embed TRW can complement and fit with perceived competing demands, e.g., legislative requirements and political agendas.
- To continue to advocate for designated leads within organisations who champion and work to embed children's rights

Training

- Consider development and roll out of a co-ordinated programme of TRW training opportunities relating to embedding TRW principles. Part of this should include specific support for when and how to utilise the CRIA process and include time to complete the matrix within sessions.
- Consider development of a programme of targeted TRW training for senior decision makers, with explicit inclusion of legislative duties linked to TRW would be useful.
- Continue discussions with Welsh Government (WG) relating to development of an organised and consistent National programme of workforce development, focussed on understanding the UNCRC, and embedding rights in practice.

Collaboration

- Explore opportunities for action learning sets where practitioners can come together to explore the challenges in embedding TRW, to seek solution together.
- Explore opportunities for collaboration event/seminars/ workshops focused on one principle.
- Explore opportunities to for more regular seminars, both inter-sector and cross-sector.



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- Consider the facilitation of an Annual TRW Conference, where anyone working with children can come and talk and learn and celebrate the work that is going on.

Directive and Accountability

- Lobby/advise WG to make a clear commitment to TRW in National Policy and Strategy relating to children (similarly to A National Strategy for an Ageing Society has), acknowledging and allocating the resource and support required to embed right way principles and/or rights within each sector.
- Lobby Government and executives in public services to integrate TRW principles into the reporting, funding applications and other processes for assuring accountability of government funded work.
- Consideration should be given by WG/CCfW for an officer charged with supporting the directive of this work, who has the knowledge, skill, and resource to work across public bodies, solely in supporting them to embed the UNCRC in their practice.
- Explore appetite for extending statutory duties relating to the participation of children more broadly across the public sector, and if appropriate lobby Welsh Government to act.

Scrutiny

- Request information from PSBs regarding how children's rights will be incorporated into 2022 Wellbeing Plans.
- Request information from headteachers/education authorities regarding plans to incorporate TRW/Children's rights into new local curricula
- Request information from Police and Crime Commissioners regarding how children's rights will be incorporated into Police and Crime Plans in 2021/22
- Explore establishing structures for the scrutiny of organisations using TRW, e.g., Annual check-ins of progress using matrix tool.

Future gaps and opportunities

- The omission of Education settings in this evaluation is clear and purposeful in this study. The Right Way Education was developed in 2017 and is due updating to ensure it reflects changes to the education context to reflect new duties to the human rights of children in the Curriculum and Assessment (Wales) Act 2021 and the Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018. Given the substantial changes in Education in Wales, it is recognised that this should be a separate piece of work to this evaluation. It is recommended that a separate and complementary evaluation and refresh of TRW: Education is undertaken.
- As the target audience of this survey was organisations already in contact with, supported by or known to the Children's Commissioner's Office, it may be useful to conduct similar research more broadly amongst Welsh organisations working with children and young people to understand in more detail why people don't use TRW. It is recommended that further work is carried out to explore the original research questions of this study with services and organisations who are not in contact with CCfW.

Further information about The Right Way work can be found [here](#)



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