

Title: Children's Perceptions of Their Access to Rights in Wales: The Relevance of Gender and Age

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Key Words: Children's Rights, Wales, Gender, Age, Policy, Equality

Abstract

This paper explores children's perceptions of gender and age as factors in accessing their rights. While much is known about the policy agenda and legal rights of children in Wales (Williams 2013), there is limited evidence of the experiences of children themselves. This article uses the child-friendly ten Extending Entitlements (The National Assembly for Wales, 2000) to measure children's experiences of accessing their rights. Data presented was collected from an online quantitative survey (2043 participants) and qualitative focus groups (180 participants) with young people aged 11 to 17. Findings suggest that a child's age and gender are related to how much young people felt able to access their rights. A number of other key trends emerged: the lack of knowledge regarding rights of young people; the difficulty of accessing rights for older young people; and adults' treatment of young people in propagating gender stereotypes. It could suggested that if these equality issues exist in Wales, where the legal and policy framework is supportive of children's rights thatt, in other nations where a rights based agenda has less politicalinflunce, that children's experiences of rights will be further limited.

1. Introduction

The discourse around children's rights has developed since the ratification of the United Nations Convention on Rights of the Child (UNCRC) in 1989 (Williams, 2013; Reynaert *et al.*, 2009; Alderson, 2000). In the UK as a whole, the ideals of children's rights are well established in policy and law (Case, 2005; Williams, 2013), although some have argued that they have been poorly implemented (Croke and Crowley, 2006, Williamson, 2007; Lewis *et al.*, 2017). What is often missing in this debate, however, is the voices of children themselves. This is despite the fact that participation in decision making and the "voice" of the child have been long recognised as important within society (Lansdown, 2001; Tisdall *et al.*, 2014).

Since the Government of Wales Act in 1998, the consecutive Governments of Wales have used their devolved powers to implement a policy and legislative framework that has placed a great deal of emphasis on the arena of children rights (Morgan, 2013). Throughout devolved governance there has been an egalitarian, universal approach to young people's rights in Wales (Williamson, 2007). It is argued that this is starkly different to the approach adopted, for instance, in England where an "opportunities" approach has been utilised (Case, 2005). Nevertheless, there is evidence that children are still unable to access all their UNCRC rights (Croke and Crowley, 2007; Croke, 2013; Croke and Williams, 2015; UK Children's Commissioners, 2015). For example, Funky Dragon (2007a) found that 65% of young people had never had the UNCRC explained to them. Young people also said they wanted to be consulted more and be able to make decisions about their lives (Funky Dragon, 2007b).

It is worth noting that the terms *children* and *young people* are both used, where *children* refers to all people from birth to the age of 18, and *young people* refers specifically to those between 11 and 18 years of age.

2. Policy and Legislative Framework in Wales

In terms of children's rights policy and law making, Wales has become renowned for its progressive, forward-thinking approach to the rights of children and young people (Case *et al.*, 2005; Thomas and Crowley, 2007; Williamson, 2007; Williams, 2012; Williams, 2013). The development of the children's rights agenda in Wales during the 1990s and 2000s was divergent from, and progressed faster than, other parts of the United Kingdom (UK) (Case, 2005; Payne, 2009). It has been claimed that this was influenced in part by the devolved status and the desire in Welsh politics to implement a distinct approach to policy (Williams, 2013; Beauchamp and Jephcote, 2015), while also being one of the few areas of cross party agreement (Butler and Drakeford, 2013). (For a more detailed discussion of the developments in children's rights agenda post-devolution see Butler and Drakeford, 2013).

Drakeford (2010) has argued that the wider policy environment in Wales in the early 2000s produced a 'children first' approach. In addition, Haines *et al.* (2004, p3) suggest that Wales has a 'strong commitment to social inclusion, consultation and participation'. This commitment was supported by a range of policy documents produced post devolution including: The Learning Country (National Assembly for Wales, 2001); Children and Young People: A Framework for Partnership (National Assembly for Wales, 2000); and "The National Basic Skills Strategy for Wales" (Welsh Assembly Government, 2005). It can be argued that these documents established a policy framework that embodied a 'positive view of young people and of what can be done to achieve the vision of a better Wales' (Haines *et al.*, 2004, p3).

It is in this social policy context that the Extending Entitlement strategy was developed (Haines *et al.*, 2004; Haines, Case and Portwood, 2004), between 2000 and 2002 through a series of policy and legislative steps. This strategy focuses specifically on

young people aged 11 to 25, and Butler and Drakeford (2013) argue that it is the foundation of post-devolution policy making for children.

The initial publication of the strategy was entitled “Extending Entitlement Supporting Young People in Wales” (The National Assembly for Wales, 2000). Jervis (2018) states that this strategy sought to establish a joined-up framework for supporting young people in Wales. It was utilised as the basis for consultation over the following years as ‘the National Assembly for Wales has drawn heavily on the many, detailed responses... and on the comments made by the individuals, agencies and young people who attended our consultative events across Wales during the summer of 2001’ (National Assembly for Wales, 2002 p1).

On the basis of this consultation, legislative direction and guidance was produced in 2002 entitled “Extending Entitlement: Support for 11 to 25 year olds in Wales. Direction and Guidance”. This document outlined the universal Entitlements for young people aged 11 to 25 (National Assembly for Wales Policy Unit, 2002). This is the basis of the ten Entitlements that have since been used as a benchmark for young people’s rights and as guidance for youth services. Morgan (2002) states that ‘Extending Entitlement’ set out, as far as possible, a set of rights which were free at the point of use and unconditional.

The Extending Entitlement Strategy was deemed by the Welsh Assembly Government as its ‘flagship strategy for promoting opportunity and choice for all young people aged 11-25 year ... the main objectives of Extending Entitlement are to unify and strengthen policy and practice for young people in Wales’ (Haines *et al.*, 2004 p5). The documentation (National Assembly for Wales, 2002) states that every young person in Wales has a basic entitlement to the following Entitlements and outlines the environment in which these Entitlements should be provided.

Every young person in Wales aged 11-25 has a basic entitlement to:

1. education, training and work experience - tailored to their needs,
2. basic skills which open doors to a full life and promote social inclusion,
3. a wide and varied range of opportunities to participate in volunteering and active citizenship,
4. high quality, responsive, and accessible services and facilities,
5. independent, specialist careers advice and guidance and student support and counselling services,
6. personal support and advice - where and when needed and in appropriate formats – with clear ground rules on confidentiality,
7. advice on health, housing benefits and other issues provided in accessible and welcoming settings,
8. recreational and social opportunities in a safe and accessible environment,
9. sporting, artistic, musical and outdoor experiences to develop talent, broaden horizons and promote rounded perspective including both national and international contexts,
10. the right to be consulted, to participate in decision-making and to be heard, on all matters which concern them or have an impact on their lives.

In an environment where there is:

- A positive focus on achievement overall and what young people have to contribute;
- A focus on building young people's capacity to become independent, make choices, and participate in the democratic process; and
- Celebration of young people's successes.

(National Assembly for Wales, 2002)

Since the original publication in 2002, the universal Entitlements have been branded as ten Entitlements (Haines *et al.*, 2004). Two versions of the Entitlements were produced: firstly, the policy version above and secondly, the young person friendly version. The latter is shown below and provides an explicit definition of specific and unconditional rights for young people in Wales (Case *et al.*, 2005). Your Rights

- a. To learn what your rights are and understand them
 - b. Make sure you are able to claim them and to understand and accept the responsibilities arising from them
2. Being Heard

It is your right to have the opportunity to be involved in making decisions, planning and reviewing an action that might affect you. Having a voice, having a choice even if you don't make the decision yourself. Your voice, your choice.

3. Feeling Good
To feel confident and feel good about yourself
4. Education & Employment
 - a. To be able to learn about things that interest and affect you
 - b. To enjoy the job that you do
 - c. To get involved in the activities that you enjoy including leisure, music, sport and exercise, art, hobbies and cultural activities
5. Taking Part/Getting Involved
To be involved in volunteering and to be active in your community
6. Being Individual
 - a. To be treated with respect and as an equal by everyone,
 - b. To be recognised for what you have to contribute and of your achievements
 - c. To celebrate what you achieve
7. Easy Access
Easy access in getting the best services that you should have, locally and nationally, and to have someone available to help you find them.
8. Health & Wellbeing
To lead a healthy life, both physically and emotionally
9. Access to Information & Guidance
To be able to get information, advice and support on a wide range of issues that affect your life, as and when you need it including advice and support relating to your career
10. Safety & Security
To live in a safe, secure home and community.

(Youth Policy Team, 2006 p1-2)

This young person friendly version provides researchers with the opportunity to explore and measure young people's perceptions of their access to these rights in Wales. The young person friendly version of ten Entitlements are utilised within this research as a measure of young people's rights in Wales and are therefore referred to as a set of rights, as laid out by the National Assembly for Wales (2002). This use of the Entitlements as rights has been undertaken in previous academic work (Case *et al.*, 2005; Haines *et al.*, 2004).

A core element of the Extending Entitlement strategy (National Assembly for Wales, 2002) focuses on service providers and supporting them in delivering coordinated

services to young people in a way ‘which maximises the ability of young people to access and benefit from their full range of Entitlements’ (Haines *et al.*, 2004 p5). In this context, Jervis (2018 p10) states the Extending Entitlement strategy goal is to ensure that vision is ‘implemented effectively through putting in place effective structures, underpinned by sufficient resources’. Part of the implementation of Extending Entitlement is the establishment of Young People’s Partnerships (YPP) in each local authority to coordinate the planning and delivery of Extending Entitlement (National Assembly for Wales Policy Unit, 2002). Part of the role of YPPs is to produce an annual delivery plan to monitor implementation of Extending Entitlement (National Assembly for Wales, 2002). In terms of evaluating the Extending Entitlement strategy there have been three identifiable documents: an initial pilot study in 2004 (Haines *et al.*, 2004); a benchmarking study in 2008 (Haines *et al.*, 2008); and a review of the strategy in 2018 (Jervis 2018).

Since the development of Extending Entitlement and its implantation in 2002, there have been a number of significant developments in the children’s rights agenda in Wales, most notably in 2004 the Welsh Government formally adopted the UNCRC (Butler and Drakeford, 2013), committing to all policies being in accordance with its tenets (Tyrie, 2010; Drakeford, 2010). This commitment led to the Welsh Government policy statement “Rights to Action” (Welsh Government, 2004) which translated the UNCRC into seven core aims for all children (all under 18-year-olds). This policy for all children runs alongside the Extending Entitlement strategy which focuses specifically on young people aged 11 to 25. While these two policy statements (Extending Entitlement and The Seven Core Aims) have common principles and outcomes, to improve children and young people’s lives universally, it could be argued that they are developed with different foci (youth work / rights) and by different

departments within the National Assembly for Wales and thus have followed different paths.

In 2009 a legislative measure was proposed with the aim of underpinning the UNCRC into Welsh governance (Sullivan and Jones, 2013). This went on to form The Rights Children and Young Persons (Wales) Measure 2011 (referred to subsequently as The Measure) - see Sullivan and Jones (2013) for a detailed account of its evolution. The Measure places all Ministers under a duty to pay due regard to the UNCRC and optional protocols in all their functions (Welsh Government, 2014). (For further information see Williams, 2013) where full discussion of the scope of The Measure is provided.) While applicable to Wales only, this measure is the first of its kind within the UK (Williams, 2013). Hence it is reasonable to suggest that Wales has positioned itself as a “champion” of children’s rights; being the only country within the UK to have legislation of this kind within national law (Sullivan and Jones, 2013).

The Children’s Rights Scheme has been developed to support the implementation of the due regard duty outlined in The Measure (Welsh Government, 2014). Part of The Children’s Rights Scheme (2014) is a Children’s Rights Impact Assessment template (CRIA), which is a six-step structured tool that can be followed to ensure compliance under section 1 of The Measure (Welsh Government, 2015). Compliance reports are produced to monitor progress made in implementing The Measure (Welsh Government, 2018).

Alongside the work of the Welsh Government in implementing The Measure, other policies and legislation contribute to the picture of children’s rights in Wales, such as the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014. The Act focuses on well-being and within Section 6 and 7 in particular the protection rights of children in particular safeguarding procedures (Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014).

3. A Case Study from Wales

All of the above provide the context for an exploration of young people's perspectives of their access to their rights (using the ten Entitlements as a measure of rights) in Wales. The research presented in this paper focuses on measuring young people's (11 to 17 year olds) experience of accessing the Extending Entitlement rights, using the child-friendly version of the ten Entitlements outlined above. More specifically, it examines the relationship between gender and age. This has been an area of limited academic focus (Tyrie, 2013), with other work having been focused on theoretical issues rather than lived experiences of children (Olsen, 1992a; Olsen, 1992b; Lim and Roche, 2000).

3.1 Methods

The research was undertaken in 2008-2009 and used a mixed methods approach combining quantitative data from an online survey (11 to 16 year olds) and qualitative data from focus groups with young people (11 to 17 year olds). The quantitative data presented evolved from a project commissioned by the Welsh Assembly Government (now the Welsh Government) in 2006-2009 to evaluate the “Extending Entitlement” strategy. One of the authors of this paper was part of the team that undertook the evaluation of Extending Entitlement (see Haines *et al.*, 2008). The quantitative data presented was collected as part of the Extending Entitlement evaluation, however the analysis of this data and the qualitative data were solely undertaken by the authors.

The Survey: 2043 young people undertook the survey as part of their school day. The sampling method was a stratified random sample from a sampling frame of all secondary schools in Wales. The survey was designed to gather information from young people about their views on accessing the ten Entitlements. Quantitative findings from the survey questionnaire were designed to measure young people’s perceived levels of access to their entitlements. The survey asked young people how able they felt to access each of the ten Entitlements; the question quoted the words used in the young person friendly version of the Entitlements. For each question, the young person was able to respond to indicate the strength of their level of agreement with the statement on a five-point symmetric Likert scale, with a mid-point of neutrality allowing ‘independence to a participant to choose any response in a balanced and symmetrical way in either direction’ (Joshi *et al.*, 2015 p397). Each entitlement was assessed using the same Likert scale with 5 the most positive response (e.g. young people felt able to access the entitlement “a lot”) and 1 being the most negative

response (e.g. young people felt able to access the entitlement “not at all”). A mean score was calculated to produce what Edmunson (2005 p129) calls ‘the central tendency of the data’. In the results presented below a mean score of 3 would indicate the mid-point of neutrality. For those Entitlements (see above) with a number of sections, for example Entitlement 4 or 6, the Entitlements were quoted as separate questions in the survey, then amalgamated to produce one score for each Entitlement. The data was analysed using descriptive and inferential statistical analysis (Bryman and Cramer, 2011). Descriptive statistical analysis included the mean calculations and frequencies (converted into percentages) of young people’s responses, including the mean perceived level of access to Entitlement scores for each gender and age sub-group. Inferential statistical tests (T-tests) were used to determine whether there were any significant differences between the results for gender and for ‘gender by age’ sub-groups (e.g. 11 year old females).

The Focus Groups: 27 qualitative focus group interviews were undertaken to gather qualitative data. The focus groups were undertaken with 125 young people in schools and 55 young people in youth groups from around Wales. Following analysis, the results from the quantitative survey were utilised to produce 22 findings which were used as prompts in the focus groups to explore the “whys” of young people’s gendered experiences in accessing their rights. At the start of each focus group an introduction to the research and the researcher was given and an explanation of what the data would be used for. The Extending Entitlement strategy and the child-friendly version of ten Entitlements were also outlined to the participants. Informed consent was gained prior to the focus group. The qualitative data once collected was analysed within a grounded approach (Strauss and Corbin, 2014), using constant comparative analysis (Thomas, 2009) to review and draw out themes from the data.

The findings from the focus group interviews and online survey are presented below, they explore young people’s perceptions of how “able” they feel to access their rights (using the ten Entitlements as a measure of rights) and explore in detail the impact of gender and age on these experiences.

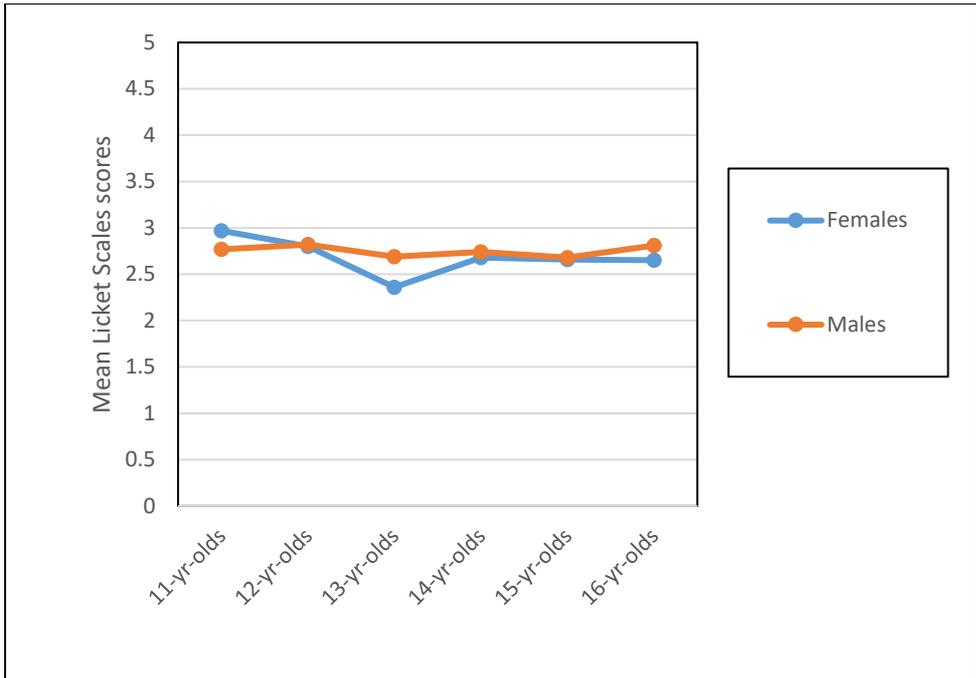
4. Findings

Before discussing the overall trends from the research, it is worth examining each of the ten Entitlements individually as there is some variation in the pattern of young people’s perceived access to rights.

4.1 Entitlement One: “To learn what your rights are and understand them”

Survey data (figure 1) suggested that there were no differences in perceived access relating to gender. This was supported by findings from the focus groups with young people feeling that gender was not an issue that affected their ability to learn about or understand their rights. For example, ‘There is a difference, [but] not really a gender issue more down to personality’ (year 9 school focus group).

Figure 1: Male and Female mean Likert scores for Entitlement One



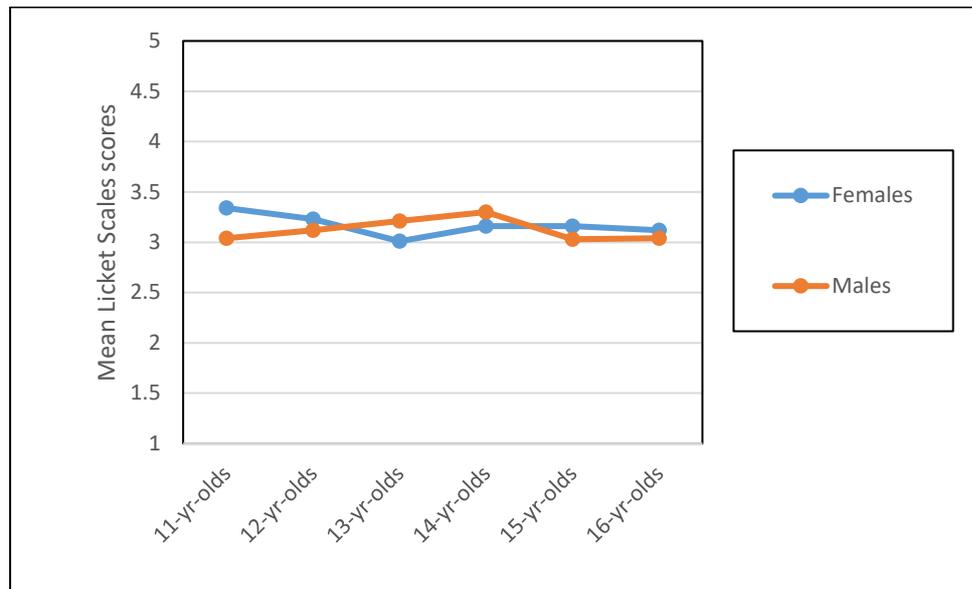
4.2. Entitlement Two - Being Heard: *“It is your right to have the opportunity to be involved in making decisions, planning and reviewing an action that might affect you. Having a voice, having a choice even if you don’t make the decision yourself. Your voice, your choice”.*

When examining gender alone, T-tests found there were no statistically significant differences between male and female mean scores in accessing Entitlement Two. The majority in the participants of the focus groups were in agreement with the online survey data suggesting that gender was not a key factor in “being heard”. Although some young people suggested that boys were better at being heard (they were thought to be louder), while others felt that girls were better at being heard (they were more likely to talk about things and therefore make themselves heard).

When exploring gender and age differences a clear pattern of opposing reported levels of access to Entitlement Two was visible (see figure 2). While, inferential statistics found statistically significant differences between males and females at aged 11 when

females felt they had higher access to this right. Females start with higher perceived access which dips again at age 13 then rises at ages 14, 15 and 16; a reverse pattern can be seen for males with a peak at 14 years of age.

Figure 2: Male and Female mean Likert scores for Entitlement Two

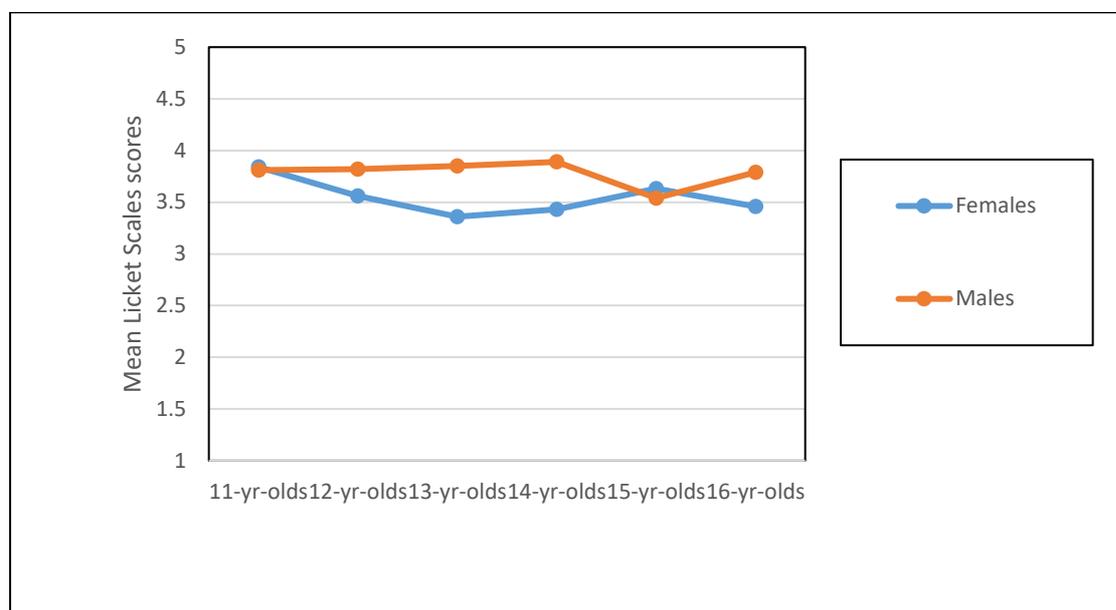


Some young people in the focus groups felt there were no gender and age differences, however the majority of participants in the focus groups believed that older young people (14 to 16-year-olds) found it easier to access Entitlement Two. As one of the young people in a youth group focus group suggested: ‘Being heard is better when older, not being able to say what you think and not being able to speak up for [your]self, there is a lack [of] confidence when younger, also a lack knowledge of things when younger.’ While this perception is experienced by females to some degree males appear to have lower access to this right when they are older.

4.3 Entitlement Three - Feeling Good: *“to feel confident and feel good about yourself”*

There were statistically significant differences (figure 3) with males reporting they felt more able to access Entitlement Three than females. When exploring gender and age differences using graphical representation an opposing pattern is visible in Entitlement Three for males and females. At age 12, 13, 14 and 16 statistically significant differences were apparent between males and females, in each case males felt that they had higher access than females.

Figure 3: Male and Female mean Likert scores for Entitlement Three



In qualitative focus groups the majority of young people felt that boys were better at feeling good and confident and that girls were more self-conscious. This is illustrated by the two quotes below: *'Girls are more insecure'* (Year 10, school focus group) and *'Girls worry what they look like'* (Year 7, school focus group). In a more nuanced approach, one focus group, consisting of older girls, suggested that boys were not actually more confident, but that people just thought they were, for example, one participant suggested that *'boys hide emotions more'* (year 9 school mixed gender focus group). When asked why young people might find feeling confident and feeling good about themselves harder as they got older one participant suggested:

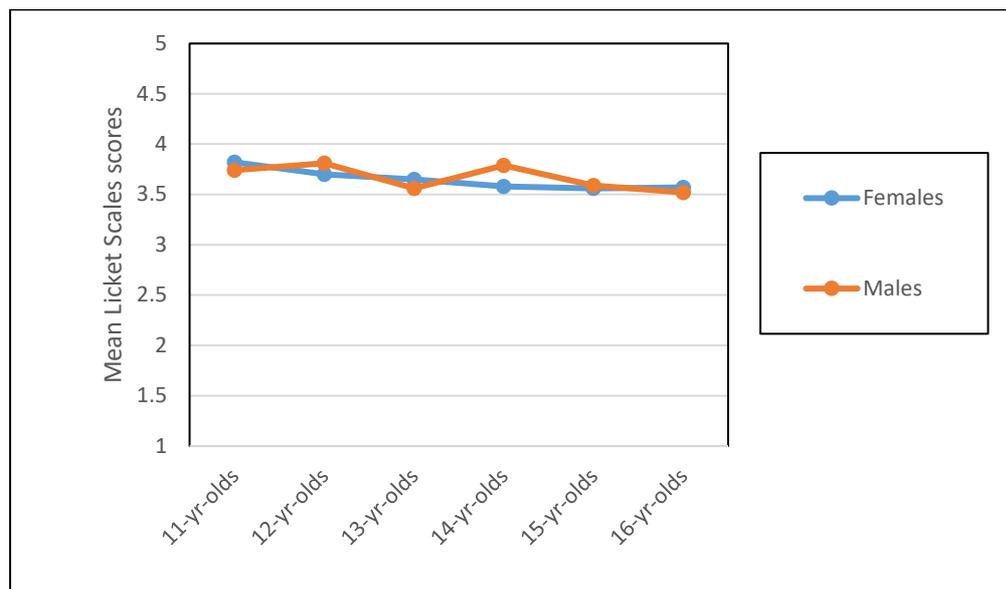
Puberty could affect you, girls are affected by peer pressure [as] at older ages boys don't feel it as much (year 10, school focus group).

What does appear to be clear across the data is a perception that boys are better at feeling good and confident about themselves.

4.4. Entitlement Four - Education and Employment: *“To be able to learn about things that interest and affect you, to enjoy the job that you do and to get involved in the activities that you enjoy including leisure, music, sport and exercise, art, hobbies and cultural activities”.*

In contrast to Entitlements Two and Three, the trend for education and employment was generally a downward trend through the age range with younger males and females having better perceived access than their older peers (figure 4). Statistical significant differences were uncovered for ages 11, 13 and 14. This suggests that at these ages young people felt they experienced unequal access to education and employment.

Figure 4: Male and Female mean Likert scores for Entitlement Four



Data from the focus groups suggests that education and employment had complex gender differences, with most young people feeling that girls were better at education, boys better at doing sports, and adult males in a better situation to get employment. Although there were no significant differences between males and females in perceived access to Entitlement Four there were a range of significant differences when examining age as well, which was also reflected in young people's comments during the focus groups. Often the young people provided examples of how employment was unfairly gendered in adult cases.

Teachers tell us all the time that girls are brighter but there are both girls and boys who are swots. Teachers are sexist. They pick only girls to do some jobs, but only pick boys to do lifting. It is not fair (youth group aged 12-13)

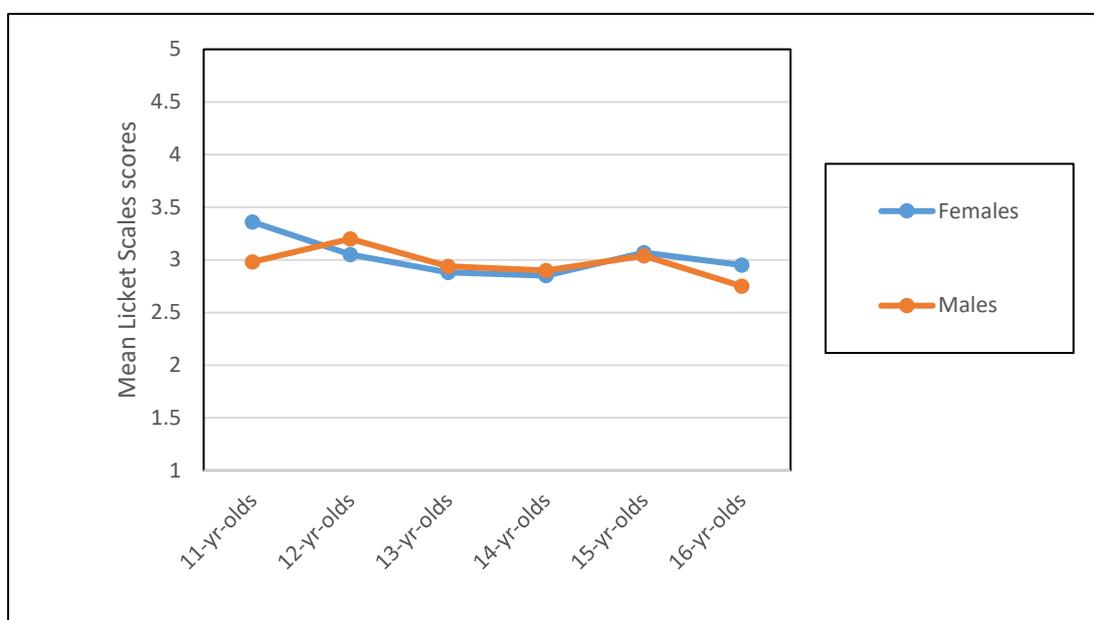
Young people generally seemed to feel that men got better jobs than women and were paid more for their work. Many of the participants felt that as young people (rather than adults) there were less gender differences in enjoying your job, or being able to access jobs (one element of Entitlement Four).

Sport and activities, integral components of Entitlement Four, were mentioned frequently in the focus groups often causing conflict between males and females in the groups. The males tended to think that boys did more sport (and occasionally the girls would agree), but often the females in the group thought that girls did as much sport as males, albeit different types of sport or activities. However, the general consensus, particularly among the younger age groups, seemed to be that boys do more sport than girls. One year 10 student suggested that *'boys do more sport... there are more opportunities such as team sport'* (Year 10, school focus group).

4.5 Entitlement Five - Taking Part/Getting Involved: “To be involved in volunteering and to be active in your community”.

There were no statistically significant differences between males’ and females’ perceived access to Entitlement Five, apart from at age 11 (Figure 5). When exploring gender and age differences in a graphical representation it can be seen that with the exception of 11-year-olds there was symmetry between the genders across the age range of 12-16 years.

Figure 5: Male and Female mean Likert scores for Entitlement Five



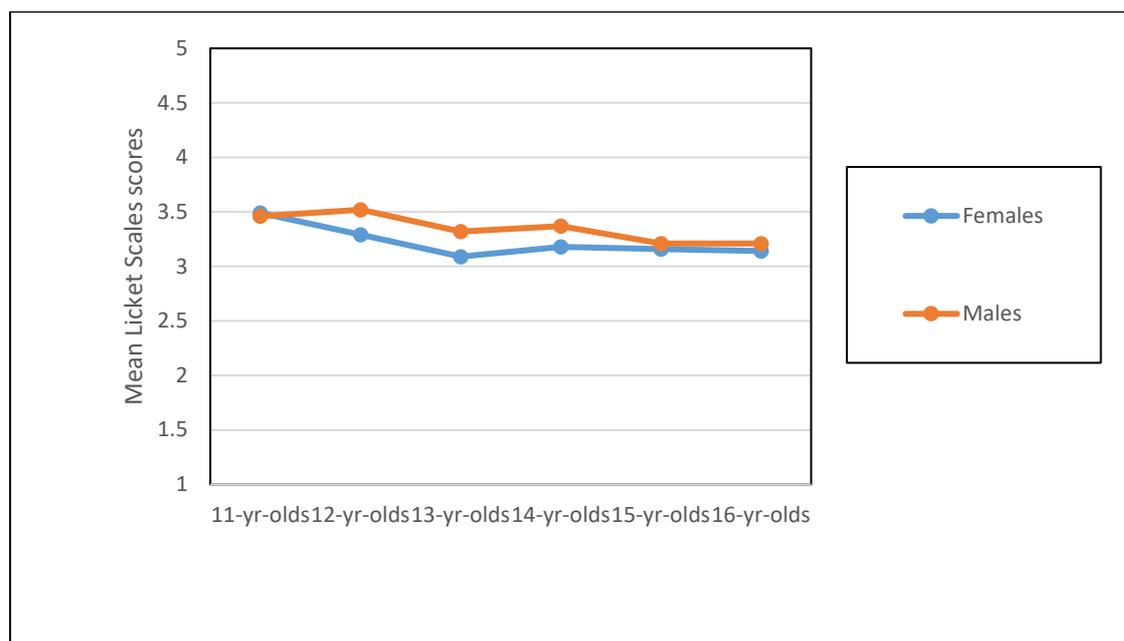
During the focus groups both male and female young people reported that girls were more involved in volunteering and accessed Entitlement Five more often. Some young people suggested that boys were better at taking part as they were less fussy about who they did activities with, one view is expressed by a year 7 boy, that ‘Boys are better, girls say they don’t want to do it because they will break a nail’ (Year 7, boy, school focus group). Some young people thought it depended on the type of volunteering and as suggested in the quote below where the volunteering takes place. For example, ‘in school girls do more [volunteering], girls put their hands up more, and

outside school makes no difference; no one does anything anyway so no point' (youth group aged 12-13).

4.6. Entitlement Six - Being Individual: *“To be treated with respect and as an equal by everyone, to be recognised for what you have to contribute and of your achievements and to celebrate what you achieve”.*

Males reported they felt more able to access their right to be individual and this was statistically significant. The general trend (figure 6) of both males and females was a decrease in perceived access to Entitlement Six. In contrast to this downward trend, 13-year-old females had the lowest levels of access for all the ages.

Figure 6: Male and Female Mean Lickert Scores for Entitlement Six



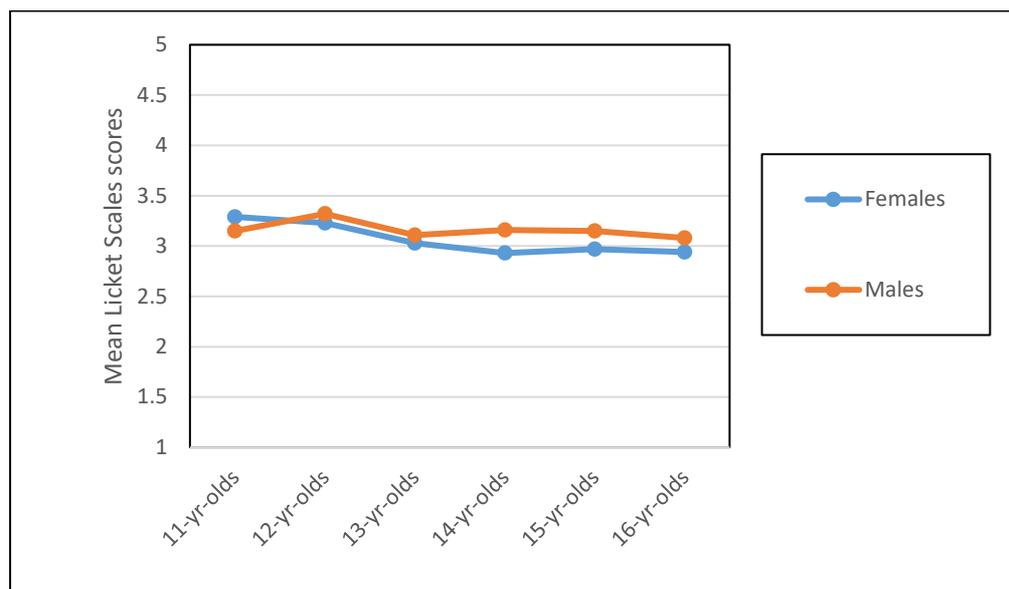
In the focus groups, both genders felt that Entitlement Six was better accessed by boys. Boys were thought to be better at being individual, such as the view that 'boys find it a bit easier' (Year 9, girls-only school focus group), although there was some disagreement about this. Girls were perceived to be more inclined to form social groups and conform to those groups, but 'girls find it harder than boys – more pressure

from males [for them] to look good’ (youth group, 15 to 17 year olds). In terms of the variation by age in the perceived access to Entitlement Six, many young people believed that older young people (14 to 16 year olds) were happier being individual; this is exemplified by the quote; ‘When younger you were more worried out what people think. [The] hardest stage for being individual is 12 to 14 [years old]’ (youth group, older age group). Interestingly, this is in contrast to the survey findings which see a steady reduction in levels of access to rights.

4.7. Entitlement Seven - Easy Access: *“Easy access in getting the best services that you should have, locally and nationally, and to have someone available to help you find them”.*

In terms of being able to access services, males felt (compared to females) more able to access this right, particularly at age 14. The trend over the age range was for females to have a clear downward trend from aged 11 to 14, while males were more stable in their access to services (see Figure 7 below).

Figure 7: Male and Female Mean Likert Scores for Entitlement Seven

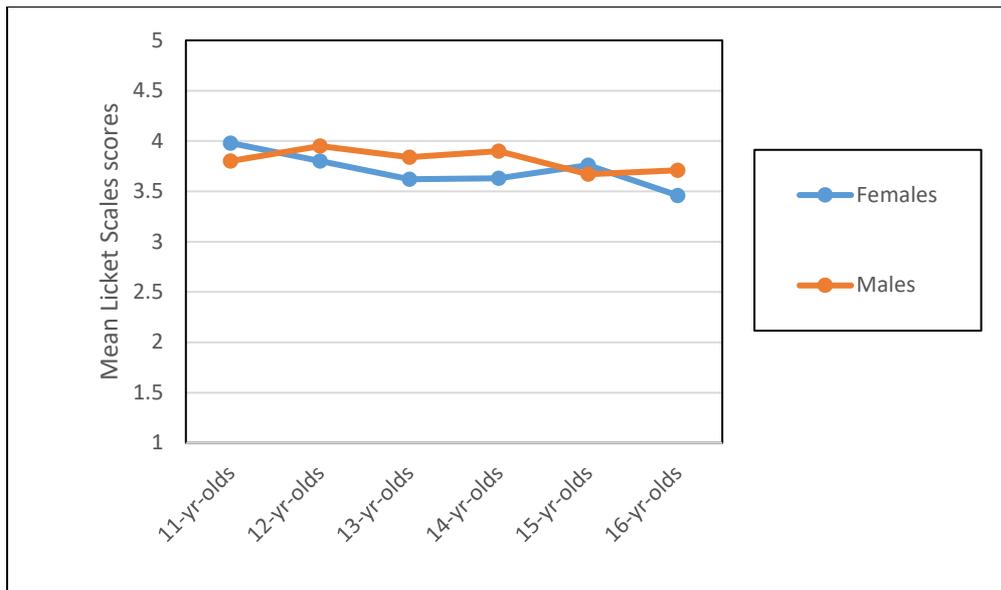


Young people in the focus groups suggested that for Entitlement Seven, gender was not as important as other factors. There was a view that '*gender makes no difference; depends more on who it is*' (Year 7, girls only school focus group) and 'accessing services is equal' (Year 8, Girls school focus group). Most young people felt they had the same opportunities to access services, but it was perceived that girls utilised this opportunity more often, which does not help explain the findings above that boys felt more able to access services. Many young people believed that older young people (14 to 16-year-olds) would find it easier to access services than the younger age groups, because when they were older they knew more about where to get services from,

4.8. Entitlement Eight - Health & Wellbeing: "*To lead a healthy life, both physically and emotionally*"

In terms of young people's perceived access to Entitlement Eight - Health and Wellbeing, overall, males and females had statistically significant differences in access, particularly at aged 14. There was a general trend (figure 8) that access to a healthy life was perceived to be harder for the older age range. It is worth noting that females had a very clear trend of high access at aged 11 and low at aged 16.

Figure 8: Male and Female mean Likert scores for Entitlement Eight



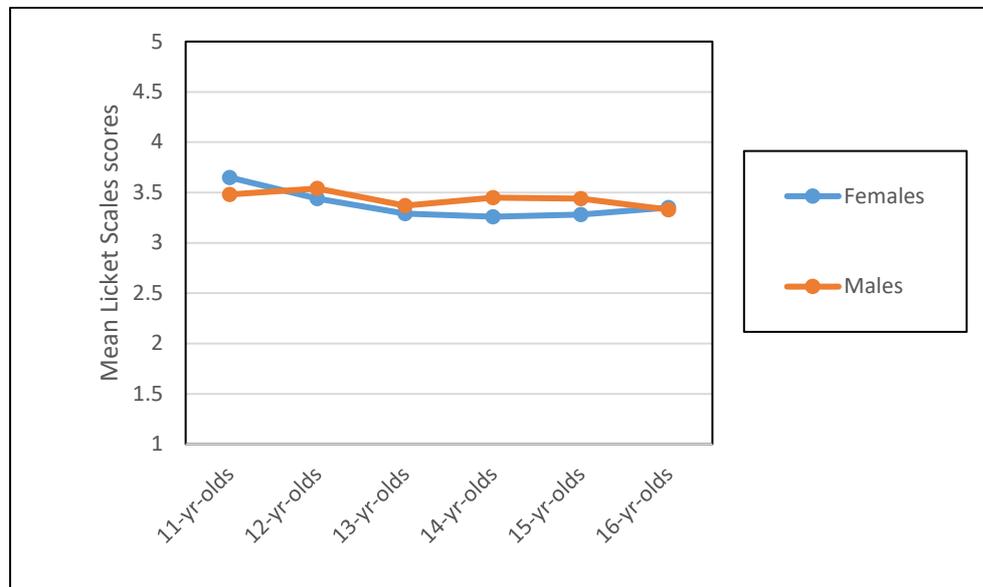
Both genders in the focus groups felt there were a range of varied gender differences for health and well-being (Entitlement Eight), with females being better at accessing some elements of being healthy (such as thinking about diet and fitness and talking about problems). Males were felt to be better at accessing other elements (doing more physical exercise and not worrying as much about things like diet), For example one male participant suggested ‘Boys are better [at eating a good diet], girls think they are fat’ (14 to 16 aged youth group) while another suggested ‘girls care about weight but do much less sport than boys, they over analyse food and don’t eat properly, [they] starve themselves’ (Year 10, school focus group: male participant). In relation to health, some focus groups talked about emotional health and it was suggested that girls were more emotionally healthy.

4.9. Entitlement Nine - Access to Information & Guidance: “To be able to get information, advice and support on a wide range of issues that affect your life, as and when you need it including advice and support relating to your career”

Although the analysis showed no statistically significant differences between males and females across the age range, there was a clear trend (figure 9) that shows again,

similarly to other Entitlements, that younger participants in the survey felt most able to access information and guidance.

Figure 9: Male and Female Mean Likert Scores for Entitlement Nine



In the focus groups, young people felt that Entitlement Nine was neither easier nor harder to access for males or females, a typical response by young people was *‘accessing information and guidance is no different, because everyone uses [the] internet’* (Year 10, mixed gender school focus group). Some young people suggested that, while girls might find it easier to ask for help, boys were happy just getting on and dealing with any problems as is illustrated in the view that, *‘Girls are better [at accessing entitlement nine], but boys will just sort it out themselves or ignore [any problem]’* (Year 8, school focus group).

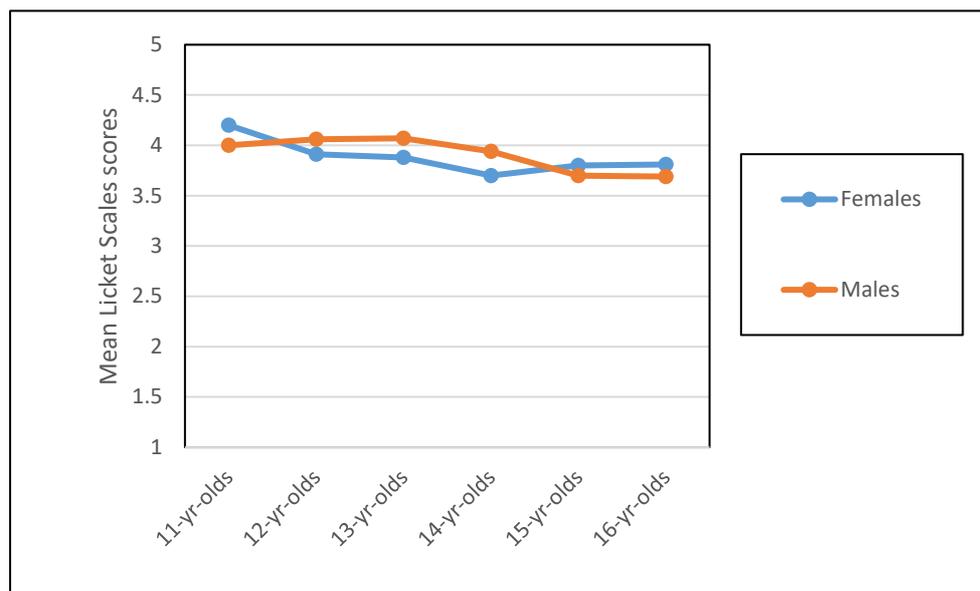
In terms of gender and age, older young people suggested that they now found it easier to access information than they had when younger. These young people were mainly Year 10 or aged 15 to 17 years old; an example comes from a 16 year old in a youth group; *‘I’m better now at accessing information and guidance’* (youth group

older young people). This finding is in opposition to young people’s perceptions within the online Survey below.

4.10. Entitlement Ten - Safety & Security: “*To live in a safe, secure home and community*”.

For Entitlement Ten, gender appeared to play a minimal role, with limited significant differences found, with the exception of young people aged 14, where males had statistically significantly higher perceived access to safety and security. TT The general trend (figure 10) was for young people to feel less able to access their right to safety and security the older they were.

Figure 10: Male and Female mean Likert Scores for Entitlement Ten



In relation to Entitlement Ten (feeling safe and secure), young people across the age and gender groups thought that girls felt less safe than boys. A typical response is provided in the view that ‘Girls are not as good at that [feeling safe] men make them feel less safe, people view girls as less safe, parents worry about safety and girls worry about it as well’ (Year 9, girls only school). There was some disagreement about the location of feeling safe; some young people raised questions about whether it was in

the home, out on the streets or in schools. Many of the girls suggested that they felt safe at home but less safe on the streets. Some of the older young people (years 9 and 10) also suggested that, although girls felt less safe than boys, boys were actually more likely to come to harm, possibly because they felt safer and put themselves in harm's way.

5. Discussion: General trends in the data

When the Entitlements are considered as a whole, young people of both genders did not perceive differences between males' and females' access to their rights. However, there were some notable exceptions for individual Entitlements (see table 1 below). Data from the online survey found that males felt better able to access their rights, four of these were statistically significant differences. In both the survey and focus group findings males were found to have better perceived access to Entitlements Three (feeling good) and Six (being individual). While the survey also found significant differences between males' and females' scores for Entitlements Seven (access to services) and Eight (health and wellbeing), in these cases males perceived themselves to be more able to access their rights. Feeling safe and secure (Entitlement Ten) was felt by the majority of young people to be easier for males to access, as girls were more afraid for their safety – although this was not backed up by statistically significant results.

A range of reasons were given during the focus groups for gender differences in perceived access to rights, including society being sexist towards females and boys being better at: saying what they want, being individual and strong, being confident, having an active lifestyle and getting involved in things. The sexism that was discussed was predominantly exemplified by the behaviour of adults; when they had different expectations of young people based on their gender and this was felt to be done in a

sexist manner. Young people reported experiencing some behaviour from adults that limited their options and was considered by them to be sexist (against both boys and girls). This sexism was the result of what young people perceived to be the different expectations of young people based on their gender, such as boys being stronger or girls being more responsible. This was a reason provided only by girls, none of the boys suggested that sexism was an issue. The finding that sexism is experienced by some young people is in line with a feminist perspective (Aronson, 2003; Lim and Roche, 2000; Olsen, 1992a).

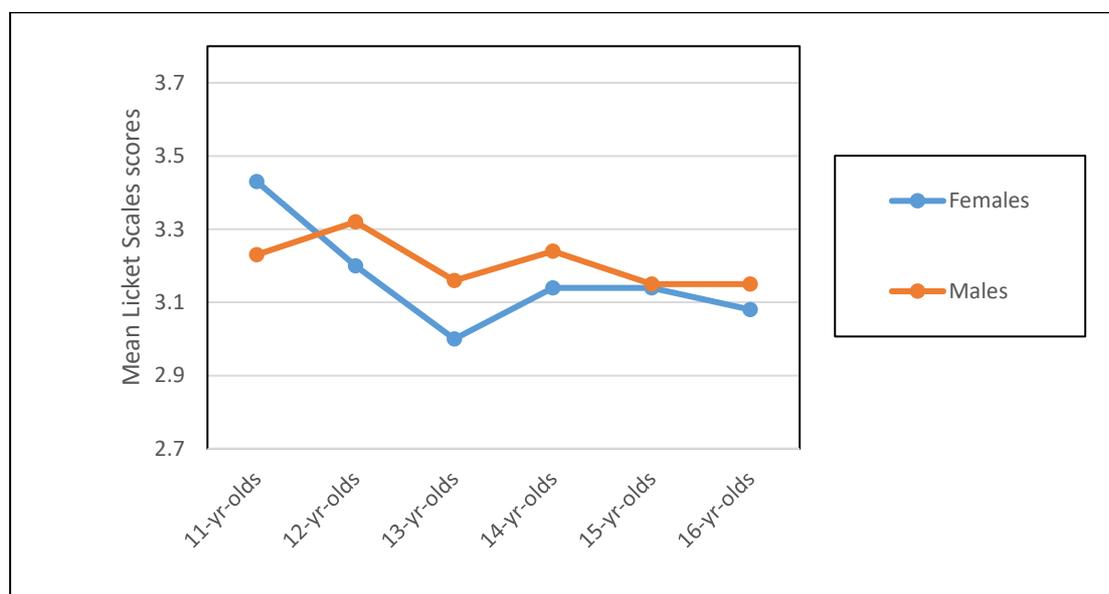
Table 1: Key results for gender for all the Entitlements.

Entitlement number	Entitlement	Mean for Female	Mean for Males	Gender with highest mean	T-test result
1	Your Rights	2.69	2.75	Male	NS
2	Being Heard	3.17	3.13	Female	NS
3	Feeling Good	3.55	3.79	Male	*
4	Education and Employment	3.64	3.65	Male	NS
5	Taking Part / Getting Involved	3.03	2.97	Female	NS
6	Being Individual	3.23	3.35	Male	***
7	Easy Access	3.07	3.16	Male	***
8	Health and Well-being	3.71	3.82	Male	***
9	Access to Information and Guidance	3.38	3.44	Male	NS
10	Safety and Security	3.89	3.92	Male	NS
Overall	All ten Entitlements	3.17	3.21	Male	NS

* $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.05$, NS Not significant

When the data from the online survey for all entitlements is combined (see figure 11) there is a clear variation between the reported experiences of males and females in the sample. The general pattern, however, is clearly related to age. Girls aged 11 tended to feel more able to access their rights but this dropped to a much lower rate at age 13 to then level off again at age 15 and 16. The boys experienced much less variation in their perceived access to their rights.

Figure 11: Male and Female mean Likert scale for all entitlements combined



The quantitative data suggests that where significant differences were found between the 'gender and age' sub-groups some trends were apparent, that 11 year old females had significantly higher access than 11-year-old males to half of the Entitlements (Entitlements One, Two, Four, Five and Six) and that older males (14 to 16-year-olds) had significantly higher access than females of the same age (Entitlements One, Two, Three, Four, Six, Eight and Ten). These results suggest that there was a general trend where younger females have highest perceived level of access to their Entitlements, but by 14 and 15 males have higher perception of their access. At age 13, females showed particularly low access, which continues to be lower than males. It can be

suggested that the age differences in young people's experiences of accessing their rights is not surprising, given the changes that young people go through during puberty (Steinberg, 1993).

Young people were asked in the focus group why they thought that in the quantitative survey 11-year-old females were found to have highest perceived access to the Entitlements. They suggested that at aged 11 young people were child-like, less self-conscious, less aware of difficulties, did not think about the future, did not care as much about image and were less influenced by peer pressure. Additionally, it was suggested that at age 11 young people are provided with more assistance and advice from adults. Young people also thought that as one got older one did fewer activities. Puberty was also nominated as one reason why older females in particular might find it harder to access the ten Entitlements; the young people suggested that when females go through puberty they become more self-conscious and worried, these trends have been documented in previous research (Steinberg, 1993; Blakemore *et al.*, 2009). Another part of life that young people, particularly younger young people, thought might make it harder to access the ten Entitlements was that as people got older they were more likely to get into trouble and become part of a "gang".

Many of the reasons provided by the young people explore why 11 year olds might have better access to Entitlements than older young people, but do not consider why female 11 year olds have better access than 11 year old males. A few suggestions for these differences were provided, including the notion that boys are happier to have things done for them and tend to cling to parents and thus do not access their Entitlements as much. Additionally, some young people suggested that 11-year-old females were better behaved than 11-year-old males. Previous research suggests that females develop at a quicker rate than males up to puberty (Stafford and Galle, 1984;

Steinberg, 1993). This may be a contributing factor to why 11-year-old females are perceived in the quantitative survey as being better able to access their Entitlements than 11-year-old males.

6. Conclusion: Moving Forward

We have examined the relationship between gender, age and young people's perceived access to their entitlements and found evidence that the age and gender of a young person can have a major impact on how able young people feel accessing their entitlements. A number of key trends emerge: the lack of knowledge regarding rights of young people (this is in line with research reported by Croke, 2013; Croke and Williams, 2015; UK Children's Commissioners, 2015); the difficulty for older young people, in particular 13 year old females in feeling able to access their rights (this appears to be influenced by issues experienced around puberty such as confidence and self-esteem); and the treatment by adults in propagating gender stereotypes.

Given these findings it can be suggested that those who work with young people could be enabling better engagement in and awareness of children's rights and should focus in particular on 13-year-old girls. While young people explained this as a growing 'awareness' of the difficulties of life this suggests further efforts are required to better support young people in knowing about their rights and feeling confident in accessing them. This could include encouraging young people to seek more adult support as they get older to facilitate this confidence in access to rights, this would apply regardless of gender.

It became apparent during the analysis of the data that age was an important factor in young people's gendered experiences of accessing their rights. It may be that to

enable all young people to access their rights, efforts need to focus more on targeting specific age and gender groups, for example, 13-year-old girls. This approach may mitigate the failure to extend rights universally as required in policy (Welsh Government, 2018).

It could, however, be argued that a more progressive approach would be to move beyond a more 'female' and 'child' focused narrative that are traditionally recognised and move towards examining the inequality in access regardless of gender or age. Both boys and girls in the study felt discriminated against (although girls appeared to experience this more than boys). This issue of a lack of gender parity should be addressed as that, a concern about the equality of opportunities for boys and girls, particularly those on both sides (and those in-between and outside of binary gender definitions) who do not confirm to societal stereotypes and 'norms' and who might feel the expectations of gender stereotypes deeper.

It can be argued that given the rights-based approach which has been generally advocated in the policy rhetoric and legislative mechanisms within Wales (Williamson 2007; Payne 2009; Tyrie, 2010; Williams 2013; Butler and Drakeford, 2013) that the inequalities which still exist in young people's experiences of their rights is an area for concern.

7. Acknowledgement

The online quantitative survey data was collected as part of a Swansea University / Interactive Feedback project evaluating Extending Entitlement commissioned by the Welsh Government (Haines *et al.*, 2008). We would like to acknowledge the work of this team including Prof. Kevin Haines and Prof. Steve Case.

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