



Toolkit: Working in partnership with children and young people to review and develop SEND services in Leeds

Having a voice and influence means that children and young people are supported to have their voices heard, to enable them to have an influence over decisions and actions that affect their lives and services they access.

It is the process in which children and young people are asked what works, what does not, what could work better and how they want to be involved in delivering the solution so that their voice can influence decision making and bring about change.

The Voice, Influence and Change Team have developed this toolkit as a resource to provide professionals with information and guidance on how they can meaningfully give young people in Leeds the opportunities to influence SEND (special education needs and/or disabilities) services.

For further information about anything in this resource pack you can contact the Local Offer and SEND Voice & Influence Coordinator at LLO@leeds.gov.uk

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Why is voice and influence important?

The special educational needs and disability (SEND) code of practice: 0 to 25 years is statutory guidance for organisations which work with and support children and young people who have special educational needs and disabilities.

1.3 / 1.4 of the code of practice states; Local authorities must ensure that children, their parents and young people are involved in discussions and decisions about their individual support and about local provision.

Specifically, local authorities must

- ensure the child's parents or the young person are fully included in the EHC needs assessment process from the start, are fully aware of their opportunities to offer views and information, and are consulted about the content of the plan (Chapter 9)
- consult children with SEN or disabilities, and their parents and young people with SEN or disabilities when reviewing local SEN and social care provision (Chapter 4)
- consult them in developing and reviewing their Local Offer (Chapter 4)
- make arrangements for providing children with SEN or disabilities, and their parents, and young people with SEN or disabilities with advice and information about matters relating to SEN and disability (Chapter 2)

Leeds has a bold ambition to be the best city for children and young people, and to be a Child Friendly City. Decision makers are committed to working WITH children and young people so that their voices are at the heart of decisions that affect them. It is also a core behaviour for all staff to listen and respond to the voice of the child (Children and Young People's Plan 2018-23)

Working restoratively with families means instead of doing things to them or for them, you work in partnership with them and this produces better outcomes and helps to build confidence and resilience.

Listening consistently to the voices of children, young people and families is central to the culture Leeds is working to create and this is evident in:

- Leeds' children and young people's 12 wishes for what makes a child friendly city. Wish 11 is that... 'Children and young people can express their views; feel heard and are actively involved in decisions that affect their lives'
- The city's Children and Young People's Plan. One of the five outcomes in the plan is that... 'All children and young people are active citizens who feel they have voice & influence'; and
- Article 12 of the UN convention on the rights of the child, which states that 'every child and young person has the right to express their views freely – about everything that affects them'.

Giving a voice and influence to children and young people in decision making demonstrates our commitment to them and acknowledges their right to shape their own future. It increases trust and can enable positive change even in complex situations.

Practitioners can feel confident that decisions are informed by what children, young people and families say they want and need, which should lead to better quality services, saving money and using resources more effectively.

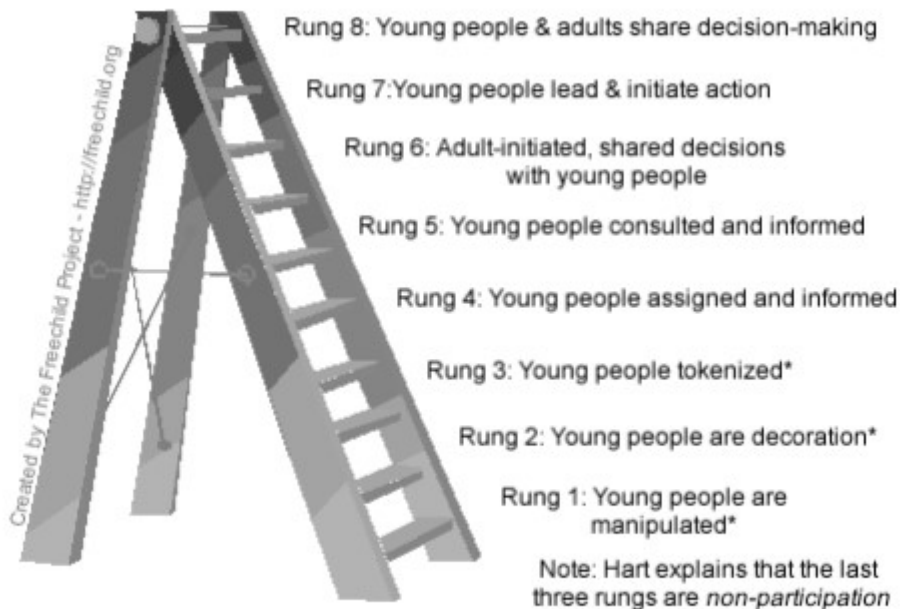
Ladder of participation

The ladder of participation is a model developed by Hart (1992) which identifies eight levels of children's participation in projects. It is designed to encourage those working with children to think more closely about the nature and purpose of children's participation in community activities.

In relation to your work, where are the opportunities to involve children and young people at different levels? This will be dependent on the appropriateness of and usefulness to what you are doing at any given time.

Manipulation, decoration and tokenism (rung 1, 2 & 3) are non-participation and ideally they should be avoided. Young people can become frustrated and disillusioned and may not participate in future projects.

Roger Hart's Ladder of Young People's Participation



Adapted from Hart, R. (1992). *Children's Participation from Tokenism to Citizenship*. Florence: UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre.

Benefits to children and young people

- Feeling valued, heard and that their views and ideas are respected
- Increased confidence in expressing their own feelings and needs
- Develops independence, self-confidence and sense of personal responsibility
- Strengthens communication skills, problem solving abilities and group work skills
- Recognition and positive feedback can be empowering
- Increased understanding of decision-making processes and political awareness
- Teaches young people to exercise their rights and respect the rights of others
- Provides opportunities to be active citizens in their community

Benefits to services

- Children and young people often provide a new perspective and innovative ideas
- Helps staff develop and improve their practice
- Increased awareness of the issues and challenges faced by young people
- Strengthens relationships and communication between staff and young people
- A greater awareness of service users' preferences and needs can lead to a more efficient and effective allocation of resources and make financial savings.
- Services may experience an increased demand due to positive feedback from service users
- To assist in meeting local and national priorities and targets and provide evidence for inspections

Role of the Voice, Influence and Change (VIC) Team

The aim of the team is to ensure children, young people and families have a voice and influence in the services they receive.

The VIC team run a range of youth voice projects that enable young people to influence SEND services in Leeds, these include:

- Leeds SEND Youth Forum
- SENate Information and Consultation Events
- SEND Partnership Board Takeover
- Recruitment and Selection Panels
- Commissioning Panels
- Working with mainstream and specialist schools to ensure students are given opportunities to have a voice and influence

The Local Offer and SEND Voice and Influence Coordinator is available to provide information, advice and support to services wanting to consult with and engage with children and young people with SEND.

Email: LLO@leeds.gov.uk

What can children and young people influence?

We talk a lot about children and young people being given the opportunity to influence service review and development, but what does this mean? Here are a few ways you can involve children and young people:

- Identifying service / team priorities
- Reviewing existing or help to develop new strategies and policies
- Recruitment of staff and/or volunteers
- Involved in developing resources such as films, website or leaflets
- Sharing personal experiences in training and at events
- Giving feedback on the service they receive and relationships/communication with staff

Once you have identified what young people can meaningfully influence, it is time to think about how you can facilitate this.

Methods for consulting with children and young people

There are many different methods for capturing the views of children and young people, here are some examples:

Surveys

Surveys enable children and young people to answer specific questions gathering quantitative information. However, you are unable to explore the responses given.

The Voice, Influence and Change Team can set up electronic surveys using Smart Surveys. The survey software enables us to ask questions using a variety of formats such as open text, ratings, multiple choice etc.

The results are presented in an excel spreadsheet, the service carrying out the survey will be sent the raw data and will be responsible for analysing the data.

If you would like to use an online survey to gather the views of children and young people please contact LLO@leed.gov.uk for more information.

Who	<p>Think about you are wanting to consult with?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pre-existing groups of young people • With a school • Promoting to wider / unknown young people <p>The Voice, Influence and Change Team can promote your survey on social media, via our networks etc.</p> <p>You need to write a short article promoting your survey and share this accordingly.</p>
What	<p>What do you want to consult on? Can the children and young people’s feedback influence change?</p> <p>Think about a maximum of 5 questions you would like young people’s views on, if you ask to many questions young people will not complete the survey. You need to make the survey as easy and quick as possible for the young person to complete.</p>
Where / When	<p>Things to think about:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How long will you keep the survey live? • We would suggest 3 to 4 weeks as a good amount of time <p>How will you promote the survey? The Voice, Influence and Change Team have several networks the survey can be shared with. You can also share the survey on social media</p>
How	<p>Always make sure you use plain English and no jargon when asking the questions, what you are asking needs to be clear as the young person completing it will not have you their to clarify.</p> <p>Once you have got your questions you need to think about how to gather the responses i.e. free text, ratings, multiple choice etc.</p> <p>Think about the young people you are consulting with, will then need symbols supporting the text?</p> <p>Design your survey in a word document including an introductory text and any images before sending it LLO@leeds.gov.uk for it to be developed as a Smart Survey.</p>

Focus Groups

Focus Groups provide services with the opportunity to speak directly to children and young people, they can be used to gather views on your service, policies etc.

During a focus group you can explore the responses given, and talk through different options with the children and young people.

Who	<p>Think about you are wanting to consult with?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pre-existing groups of young people • With a school • Promoting to wider / unknown young people <p>You need to think about the different levels of needs and how these will be met i.e. teacher support, interpreters etc.</p> <p>Once you have decided who you would like involved you need to create a flyer promoting the opportunity to the young people.</p>
What	<p>What do you want to consult on? Can the children and young people's feedback influence change?</p> <p>Think about 3 or 4 questions / areas you would like young people's views on or elements of the policy you would like them to review</p>
Where / When	<p>If you are consulting with a pre-existing group or school speak to them about the best time for you to visit their group</p> <p>If you are promoting to unknown young people you need to decide if you are going to run the focus group via an online platform or in person.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Venues: think about how accessible venues are in terms of location and accessibility • Times: offer a couple of sessions at different times. • Supporting levels of need: speak to the individuals involved to how you can best support them and adapt your session accordingly <p>You will need parental consent for anyone under the age of 18 years old to take part in the focus group either online or in person.</p>
How	<p>A good length of time for a focus group is about 60 to 90 minutes</p> <p>Write a plan for your session</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welcome / icebreaker • Introduction to the topic / consultation • Use a creative activity to gather feedback • Break / short game • Continue consultation

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What next – always let participants know what will happen with their feedback • Thank you and goodbye <p>Tips for running a session</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Session plan with symbols i.e. boardmaker, widgeit • have fidget toys available for young people to use • book an additional ‘quiet room’ • Incentives such as vouchers are often a great way of thanking young people for their time and feedback.
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Mystery Shoppers

Mystery shopping can involve a range of different exercises, such as visits, telephone calls, email enquiries and internet research. Organisations must have systems in place to ensure that children and young people’s assessments of services are fed back and acted upon.

Who	<p>Think about you are wanting to consult with?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pre-existing groups of young people • With a school • Promoting to wider / unknown young people <p>You need to think about the different levels of needs individuals will require to complete the mystery shopping and how these will be met</p> <p>Once you have decided who you would like involved you need to create a flyer promoting the opportunity to the young people.</p>
What	<p>Work with young people initially to find out what they want from the service they are going to mystery shop; and come up with a scoring criteria for the different elements of the mystery shop.</p> <p>Make sure young people and anyone supporting them know what is expected of them.</p>
Where / When	<p>Agree with the young people you are working with when they will carry the mystery shopping and arrange how you will gather their feedback after i.e group meeting, telephone conversation, completing a feedback form etc.</p>
How	<p>Agree with young people a criteria and scoring system for the mystery shopping exercise. Mystery shopping can be a visit, a phone call or even navigating a website.</p> <p>Set out timescales of when the mystery shopping will take place.</p> <p>Agree how young people will provide their feedback following the mystery shopping i.e. group meeting, telephone conversation or completing a feedback form.</p> <p>Following the mystery shopping don’t forget to complete a short report to share with young people about how their involvement has informed change.</p>

Recruitment and Selection

When recruiting to a post that involves working with children and young people with SEND it is advised to involve young people in the interview element of the process.

Who	<p>Think about which young people you may want involved</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Service users • SEND Youth Forum • Students from a nearby school <p>Once you have decided who you would like involved you need to create a flyer promoting the opportunity to the young people.</p>
What	<p>There are different ways young people can be involved in the interviews, you need to decide which method you are going to use</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Young persons panel • Sitting on the adult panel • Adult panel asking a question submitted by the young people
Where / When	<p>Will you involve young people be interviewing virtually or in person?</p> <p>Once you have a date for the interview panel you should arrange a planning meeting with the young people.</p>
How	<p>Young person's panel</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share the job description with young people and talk about the important parts of the job • Find out from young people what qualities they think it is important for the candidate to have • Work with the young people to come up with a set of questions for the candidates along with a scoring criteria • Agree which young people will ask which questions (and practice asking the questions)! <p>Sitting on an adult panel</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If a young person is invited to sit on an adult panel it is important the chair of the panel speaks to the young person prior to the panel to introduce themselves, explain what will happen and also work with the young person to come up with a question they will ask and the scoring criteria for the question <p>Adult panel asking a question submitted by the young person</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If you are unable to facilitate a young person actively being involved in the interview panel then the adult panel could ask a question on behalf of the young people • Share the job description with the young people and agree a question and scoring criteria that the adult panel will ask on the young person's behalf <p>It is always advised to reward young people for talking part in interview panels, vouchers (online or instore) are always a winner!</p>

SENate

In Leeds the SENate event takes place twice a year, the event is for secondary aged students with SEND. Students come together to take part in consultations and find out about services in Leeds.

The SENate is a great opportunity for services to carry out consultation activities with young people as part of the information and consultation marketplace.

Leeds SEND Youth Forum

The Leeds SEND Youth Forum are a group of young people 11 to 25 years old with SEND who live and / or go to school in Leeds.

Forum members have signed up to receive monthly voice and influence opportunities that enable them to influence services in Leeds.

The Leeds SEND Youth Forum is a virtual group, so all sessions are delivered on online platforms.

If you would like to share your consultation opportunity with the Leeds SEND Youth Forum or if you would like to meet with them virtually you can email the Local Offer and SEND Voice and Influence Coordinator for more information (LLO@leeds.gov.uk).

Ice-breakers

Ice-breakers are a great way to start a session whether it is virtual or in person. The icebreaker games enable everyone to join in and 'break the ice' before the session starts.

Human Bingo

Human bingo is a great way to get everyone talking! Each young person has a bingo card with 6 or more statements i.e. someone who has a brother, someone who likes pizza etc.

Young people are encouraged to go round the room and speak to others till they have found a person for each of the statements (you cannot have the same person twice).

The person who has a name in every box shouts BINGO and is the winner.

Would You Rather

Give everyone an option to choose

- Ice Cream or cake?
- Beach or mountains?
- Netflix or Disney Plus?

You can have everyone shout it out, raise a hand or vote etc.

Round Robin Questions

If you want to keep it simple, you can ask everyone to answer the same question. The possibilities for these questions are endless, but if you need some help getting started, see some examples below.

- If you could have a superpower, what would it be?
- What has been the best day of your life so far?
- What's the worst travel experience you've ever had?
- What's the best TV show you're watching?
- What did you have for breakfast?
- What's the most-listened-to song in your streaming playlist?
- Which website do you use most often?
- What is your favourite junk food or snack?
- What is your favourite book?
- What is your favourite animal and why?

Creative Consultation Activities

Talking Mats

Talking mats is an interactive resource can be used with young people to enable them to express their views and opinions in an interactive way.

If you are asking a question, provide a number of different pictures that can be used for answers. The young people can then hold up / identify their answer to the question using the pictures available.

Traffic Light Tool

A lot of young people will be very familiar with the 'traffic light' tool. Having a simple traffic light enables a young person to quickly inform you about how they are feeling.

- Green: Positive / Good
- Amber: Need additional help / Not Sure
- Red: Negative / Not Good

Vote with your feet

Feet voting is expressing your preferred option / opinion by action (voting with your feet).

You can ask a question and have different options up around the room for students to choose their preferred answer / opinion.

Drawing

Drawing is a great way to gather the views of young people, you can ask young people to answer questions by drawing how they feel or what they like to do. This is a simple consultation exercise that involves pen and paper.

Bead Boxes

Ask young people to vote / express their opinions by providing them with different beads and have boxes that represent different possible answers (remember to use pictures).

Students will then place their beads (or other items) in the box that relates to their opinion / answer.

Questionnaires and Surveys

Questionnaires and surveys are a great way to ask a number of questions providing students with the opportunity to give their response / views. If using a questionnaire to consult with young people then remember to use symbols / photos to ensure that all students understand the questions you are asking.

The Voice and Influence Team can develop online surveys for you, for more information about this contact Kayleigh Thurlow (kayleigh.thurlow@leeds.gov.uk).

Promoting your opportunity to young people

The Voice, Influence and Change Team can promote and share your voice and influence opportunities with a range of networks.

Our networks include:

- Leeds Local Offer network: professionals working with families with a child with SEND
- SENCo's: primary & secondary
- Specialist Schools: principals and voice and influence leads
- Parent and Carers Support Groups
- Children and Young People's Groups
- Leeds SEND Youth Forum: young people aged 11 to 25 years old who have expressed an interest in giving their views and feedback on services

If you would like us to share your opportunity email LLO@leeds.gov.uk

When promoting your opportunity it is great if you can offer the young people incentives for their involvement. Incentives can be things like shopping vouchers, meal vouchers or as simple as providing refreshments at a session.

Feedback

Following consultations with children and young people it is good practice to provide feedback.

Letting young people know what has happened with their views and feedback, and how they have influenced change is a vital part of the voice and influence process.

You can provide feedback in several ways:

- Consultation report
- You said, our response
- Video feedback

We encourage all services to share their feedback directly with young people who have contributed but also on the Leeds Local Offer website.

On the Leeds Local Offer website there is a 'consultation feedback' section that enables us to show children and young people how they are making a difference (<https://tinyurl.com/SENDYCYPFeedback>). Email your feedback to LLO@leeds.gov.uk for it to be uploaded onto the website.

All feedback that hosted on the Leeds Local Offer website will also be included in the six monthly voice and influence reports that are shared with our wider network, City Councillors and presented at strategic boards.

Useful Resources

There are lots of great guides and resources that have been developed to support services to engage and involve children and young people.

One Minute Guide – Voice and Influence

Leeds has a bold ambition to be the best city for children and young people – a child friendly city. At the heart of making this a reality is a commitment to working restoratively with children and young people so that their voices are at the heart of decisions that affect them.

[One minute guide: Voice and influence \(leeds.gov.uk\)](#)

SEND Code of Practice

Guidance on the special educational needs and disability (SEND) system for children and young people aged 0 to 25, from 1 September 2014.

[SEND code of practice: 0 to 25 years - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989)

Enshrines the right of children to be involved in all decisions that affect their lives. Article 12: States the child who is capable of forming his or her own views has the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.

[OHCHR | Convention on the Rights of the Child](#)

Children Act of 1989

Local authorities have a legal duty to listen to the wishes and feelings of all children, including children in care. The act makes clear the expectation that services will listen to CYP both in relation to their own individual case and in terms of influencing design and delivery of services.

[DCSF-00185-2010.pdf \(ioe.ac.uk\)](#)

Children's Act 2004

Places a duty on local authorities to ascertain children's wishes and feelings when making decisions within child protection processes. In order to keep the child in focus during the CP process professionals should develop a relationship with the child, elicit their wishes and feelings, and provide children with honest and accurate information about what is happening

[Children's Act 2004 - General Practice Notebook \(gpnotebook.com\)](#)

Children and Young People's Plan 2018-2023

The 2004 Act required local authorities to produce a Children and Young People's Plan (CYPP) – the overarching strategic plan for improving the lives of children and young people in their area.

[CMT18-022 Childrens and YP Plan 18-23.pdf \(leeds.gov.uk\)](#)

Participation Guide

This guide provides practical advice on how to involve younger children under the age of 11.

Professionals working with children must realise that every child has a right to be involved and that any child who wants to take part can be included in the process.

[E young spice cover \(ioe.ac.uk\)](#)

Council for Disabled Children – participation resources

A resources hub that brings together a wide collection of practical advice, guidance and toolkits on how to ensure effective participation with children, young people and their families.

[Participation resources \(councilfordisabledchildren.org.uk\)](#)

Barnardos – Finding Your Voice

Finding Your Voice is a toolkit for supporting and enhancing children's and young people's voice in schools and their communities. The toolkit is intended to put children and young people at the centre of decision making. It enables adults to support them to conduct a research and action project in order to make changes in their community on things which matter to them.

[FINDING YOUR VOICE.pdf \(barnardos.org.uk\)](https://www.barnardos.org.uk/resources/finding-your-voice)

Viper Guide – Hear Us Out

Guide looking at the steps you should follow when setting up or running participation opportunities for groups of disabled young people.

[Viper Guide FINAL.qxd \(allfie.org.uk\)](https://www.allfie.org.uk/resources/viper-guide-final)

Creative participation methods

This How To guide aims to provide some ideas and information for organisations working with children and young people to help them get started using creative methods

[Layout 1 \(eastsussex.gov.uk\)](https://www.eastsussex.gov.uk/resources/creative-participation-methods)