



Principles of Children's and Young People's Participation

Involving children and young people in decision-making should be underpinned by the following principles:

- Clear and visible commitment to involving children and young people with a route map of how to make it happen.
- Children's and young people's involvement is valued.
- Children and young people have equality of opportunity to be involved.
- Children's and young people's participation and involvement are continually evaluated and reviewed.
- Quality standards.



Effective Participation – A Checklist

What are we consulting about?

- It is important to be clear about the objectives and the boundaries.
- Involve children and young people in important decisions.

For example:
New recreational facilities in the community? School meals policy? Curriculum provision? Teaching and learning? Target-setting? Behaviour policy? Uniforms? Staffing? Schools must provide the National Curriculum, but can decide how to timetable and teach. Pupils could also be involved in deciding **whether** to change the school uniform and **what** the new one should be.

Whom do we consult?

- The answer to the 'what' question above will inform this, so that children and young people who will be impacted by the service can contribute to its design.

For example:
All children and young people in the LEA? In a specific part of town? In specific types of schools? Specific groups or ages? Specific classes?
Consider carefully how to ensure those with special needs are involved on an equal basis. The SEN toolkit (DFES 558/2001) provides detailed advice on this.
A strategy is needed to involve those excluded from school.

At what stage?

- This will be informed by the 'what' and 'whom' questions above. Getting this right will impact on the level of children's and young people's commitment to the process and the amount of learning they get out of it.
- Bring them as close to the decision-maker as possible.

For example:
It may not be possible to involve children and young people at all stages of the decision-making process. However, as a general rule, it is best to involve them as early as possible. The earlier they get involved, the clearer their understanding of all the issues: required outcome, limitations on outcomes and their own involvement, time requirements and their rights and responsibilities in the process.

How much power do children and young people have?

- Set out clearly their role in the decision-making process. Be open about the limits to ideas and recommendations e.g. how their role relates to that of others involved in the process.

For example:
It is crucial to be clear about the level of control to give to children and young people to see the process to the end. Some decisions may require greater involvement of adults than others. So identify the powers being shared as well as those being completely delegated. Make it clear how each stage of the decision-making process relates to the next.

Are there any equal opportunities issues which need to be considered?

- Consider the diversity of those being involved and ensure it is representative.

For example:
Are we talking to children and young people with SEN? Are boys and girls fairly represented? What about pupils in rural areas? Are we only talking to articulate youngsters and not enough to the less vocal, or less motivated? What more can we do to provide opportunity for all?

Which method, or combination of methods, is most appropriate?

- Select the method carefully to involve hard-to-reach groups and the very young. Involve children and young people in choosing the method where appropriate.

For example:
Youth councils/forums? School councils? Web-based intranet surveys? Videos? Questionnaires? Peer-support systems? Voting? Informal workshops? Role play?
The method used will be partially determined by the answer to 'How much power do children and young people have?'
Make ways of participating relevant to the group of children and young people.

Who will manage and conduct the process?

- Involving children and young people in managing the process will command their trust.
- Use existing mechanisms, e.g. youth advisory bodies, to do this.

For example:
Is it appropriate and necessary for an adult alone, or working with some children and young people to be responsible for the process?

What resources do we have to do this?

- Think about budgets and training.

For example:
Consider the financial, material and staff resources you need. Which resources already exist within the LEA or school? What more is needed?

Do children and young people understand the decision-making process?

- If children and young people are to influence decisions, they need to understand how they are made.

For example:
Do the children and young people know who is involved in the process? Who has the final say? Who else is being consulted? What procedures have to be followed?

Are there any challenges and risks?

- Consider the organisation's needs.

For example:
Consider what might go wrong to either delay or stop the process. Establish fall-back plans. Ensure that children and young people are aware of the challenges and risks.

When?

- Flexibility is the watchword.
- Convenience for children and young people is important.
- Use what works best for you.

For example:
If planning a one-off consultation, think about timing and if it can be combined with anything else e.g. local surveys, adult consultations or mock elections during local elections. Consultation need not happen during school hours or when children and young people are likely to be engaged in social events.

What about feedback?

- Feedback needs to be timely to avoid children and young people becoming disillusioned.

For example:
Children and young people naturally want to know how their views have been taken into account, and if not, why not. So identify what has changed as a direct result of the process and inform them. This needs to be presented in an easy-to-understand format.

Where do we meet?

- Consider arranging meetings on children's and young people's own territory, or more comfortable settings for them.
- Convenience helps the smooth running of the process.

For example:
Accessibility and transportation in terms of distance and mobility/special needs are critical. If meetings are required, consider accompanying children and young people to venues, especially those not likely to be familiar with the area.

Is it fun and interesting for children and young people?

- Keep a balance between having fun and serious work.

For example:
Ensure work is attractive so that children and young people can enjoy doing it. If children and young people feel like they are not being challenged by the process they are likely to lose trust in its importance.

What are the rewards for children and young people?

- Do not assume that because 'it is good for children and young people', there is no need to tell them what the rewards are.

For example:
Why should they be involved, what's in it for them? For example, sitting on the advisory committee for the local council contributes to aspects of citizenship education and can be recorded in pupil's Progress Files, or as part of the course work for the GCSE (Short course) for Citizenship studies.

Are we sharing good practice with other schools and LEAs?

- Learn from other people's mistakes and successes.

For example:
There is some excellent work taking place. It is useful to visit other schools to share good practice. Some examples of these can be found at www.wiredforhealth.gov.uk/participationguidance