

Guidance

Youth voice in policymaking

Guidance developed by DCMS to help policy officials involve young people in policymaking.

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[Department for Culture, Media and Sport](#)

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Applies to England

Documents

 [Getting ready to involve young people in policy](#)
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 [How to work with young people in policy](#)
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[Methods for engaging young people](#)
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Details

This guidance was developed by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) to help policy officials engage with young people in a way that benefits them and leads to better policy outcomes. It relates to young people aged 11 to 18 and sometimes up to the age of 25 (depending on the specific types of opportunity and group being engaged).

The guidance provides a step by step introduction to reasons, methods and approaches for engaging young people in policymaking.

What is youth voice

Youth voice is a broad term for a wide range of different activities that provide young people with the opportunity to meaningfully contribute to and influence decisions which impact them and their communities.

Why policymakers should work with young people

Engaging with young people can be hugely rewarding and provide fresh perspectives. Ministers and policy officials are increasingly seeking youth perspectives, and those of service users more broadly, to inform policy development and implementation.

Young people can be considered experts by experience. Using youth voice effectively ensures that policy officials have a more realistic and accurate understanding of the communities they are working with, helping to deliver more successful policies with greater impact.

Policy officials should aim to integrate youth voice into decisions and policies wherever young people's current interests or futures may be impacted by the outcome.

Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child grants every child the right to express their views, feelings and wishes in all matters affecting them, and to have their views considered and taken seriously. Government and policy officials need to recognise Article 12, and consider its application within the policymaking process.

Within local government, Section 507B of the Education Act 1996

requires local authorities to consult and take into account the views of young people when exercising their [statutory duty](#) to secure leisure-time activities and facilities for young people. Updated guidance to support local authorities to deliver the duty was published by DCMS in 2023

Better policies

The main reason for including youth voice within the policymaking process is that the resulting policies will be better adapted for their users, and more sustainable for future generations. Policies that have been developed with, or reviewed by, young people will be more responsive to their wants and needs, as well as better received in the long-run as young people become adults.

Positive outcomes for young people

Young people involved in policymaking:

- feel more engaged and connected to their local community and government
- develop political knowledge and awareness
- gain skills such as communication and public speaking

It can be especially beneficial for young people who feel disenfranchised by government decisions. Other reported benefits include improved mental health, better education and employment outcomes.

Benefits for government and policy officials

Engaging with young people increases a policy official's awareness of the issues that matter to them, and the support they need from the government, resulting in a more balanced understanding of the opinions of different stakeholder groups. It also provides opportunities for professional development, including learning how to engage with diverse groups spanning different ages and accessibility requirements.

“It provides ministers and officials with a more balanced view of sentiments across stakeholders to make political decisions which have cross-cutting effects.”

Policy official

It is important that engagement is done well. The risks of poor youth engagement are:

Young people feel that their input is not valued by government

This negatively affects young people's perception of government and policy officials, and could decrease the likelihood of them engaging with politics as citizens as they grow up. There is also a risk of the interaction affecting their mental health and perceptions of themselves; they might feel their opinion is wrong or unimportant. They could end up viewing future efforts to engage with young people or other stakeholders as tokenistic and develop a mistrust of policymaking and government in general.

The resulting policies have little impact, or poor consequences for young people, making them unsustainable

This could alienate young people and further entrench inequalities. This also means that policies are inefficient. Less successful policies result in more frequent revisions that require more in depth reviews, evidence gathering and ultimately more funding to improve or adjust. This means that poor youth engagement can have far-reaching effects on budgets.

Contact us

If you have questions or feedback, or if you need further support to implement youth voice in your work, please contact the Department for Culture, Media and Sport at youthvoice@dcms.gov.uk.

Additional guidance, toolkits, frameworks and information to support hand-ons delivery of youth voice and participation activities can be found on the [Centre for Youth Voice website](#).

Collaborators

This guidance was developed in 2023, revised in 2026 and was co-created with young people, government departments and youth sector organisations.

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Government departments and youth sector organisations

- British Youth Council (now closed)
- Department for Culture, Media and Sport
- Department for Education
- Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
- Department for Work and Pensions
- Duke of Edinburgh Award
- Girlguiding
- HM Treasury
- Home Office
- Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government
- Ministry of Justice
- National Citizen Service (now closed)
- National Youth Agency
- Northern Ireland Office
- Onside
- Scottish Government
- Scouts
- The National Lottery Community Fund
- UK Government Wales
- UK Youth
- YMCA

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