Department for Culture, Media & Sport

Guidance

Getting ready to involve young people in policy

Published 28 January 2026

Applies to England

Contents

This guidance provides best practice information to help you prepare to engage young people in policy. Proper consideration of best practice, ways of working, safety and inclusivity will help you to conduct meaningful engagement.

Incorporating youth voice in the policy cycle

You should aim to meaningfully incorporate youth voice in the development and evaluation of any policy that will involve or impact young people. Youth engagement should be planned effectively, with approval from senior policy officials and, if appropriate, ministers.

Wherever possible, the extent of youth involvement should be proportionate to the impact that a policy will have on them. As a general rule, the more a policy is expected to impact young people, the greater the extent of their involvement in the decision making process should be. It is good to check that young people are engaged only when there are genuine opportunities for their input and feedback to be actioned. This will avoid wasting time and resources for all parties. Completing a Children's Rights Impact Assessment can help assess the need to engage

young people, as well as provide evidence to present to senior leaders.

Ideally, young people should be engaged throughout the whole policy cycle so that their input can help to guide policy initiatives from the outset of research, to the practicalities of implementation. When helping us to develop the guidance, young people have told us they are particularly interested in feeding into the idea generation, research, and appraisal stages, ensuring their experiences and voices are taken into account during the design of a new policy.

The table below includes ideas from young people and policy officials about how to incorporate youth voice at different stages of the policy development process.

Stage of the process	Idea
Identifying a policy issue to solve	You could use input from surveys or petitions to identify what issues young people are passionate about or where they want to see change.
Gathering evidence from stakeholders	Ensure young people are consulted as stakeholders. Coordinate with specialist organisations that work with young people or have existing youth boards.
Generating options using findings	Make sure young people have the opportunity to propose their own solutions, in meetings, surveys, workshops. Including a variety of youth voices with different individual experiences will help to generate better options.
Appraising options	Allow young people to vote and give feedback on options.
Deciding on final policy and legitimation with wider government	Ensure that young people understand how final decisions on policy will be made.
Implementing the policy, choosing delivery partners	Young people can be included by taking part in grant assessment panels or having a say on which delivery partner is chosen.
Delivering the policy with partners	You could choose to work with partners that have a youth steering or advisory group.
Monitoring and evaluation	Create opportunities for young people to be involved in impact analysis and give their views on what needs to be changed.

> For advice on which methods to use at different stages of policy development, see 'Methods for engaging young people'.

If direct engagement with young people is not possible, specialist organisations could provide insights or support. It can also be helpful to check research and reports published by youth sector organisations for existing findings that might be relevant, to avoid duplicating evidence that is already out there. Where it is not possible to incorporate youth voice, transparency is key for young people to understand why this is.

Protecting young people's personal data

When engaging young people in policy activities it is important to consider any privacy and data protection issues from the outset. Under the UK General Data Protection Regulation (the UK GDPR), a Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA) will be required if any of the activities involve the collection and use of personal data relating to children or young people, which is likely to result in a high risk to the rights and freedoms of the relevant children or young people.

The DPIA is an essential part of your accountability obligations under data protection legislation. You will need to consider the nature, scope, context and purposes of the processing, including the personal data collected, how it will be used, stored and shared and the lawful basis for processing. The DPIA process should help you to reduce any privacy risks for young people by considering factors such as obtaining the appropriate level of consent (or parental consent if required), minimising the data collected and ensuring transparency information is written in an age appropriate language and is easy to understand.

For additional guidance, including a sample DPIA template, see the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) website.

Recruiting young people

This section of the guidance will cover how to recruit an appropriate and diverse sample of young people, and how to overcome barriers to engagement.

To incorporate youth voice effectively, try to identify and recruit a diverse and representative sample of young people. Collecting multiple perspectives on the same topic can help to ensure that a policy meets the needs of a range of users.

You might consider the lived experience or characteristics of young people

related to the policy area. For example, when developing a policy to reduce gambling harms, you may need to speak to young people that are experienced gamblers and young people that have just started to gamble. In general, young people want to provide input on policies that they are passionate about and which are relevant to their lives.

Make sure all groups are represented

It is also important to consider the barriers that young people might face in engaging, and seek to mitigate these from the outset to ensure that no voices are being excluded.

Young people might typically be under-represented due to:

- living in very rural areas

- having little to no access to the internet

- living in areas with higher levels of deprivation and inequality

You could select participants randomly, or take a more targeted approach to ensure marginalised groups are represented. Consider setting minimum targets for representation in the sample. For example, in a sample of 12, you could set a minimum target of 5 young women, 5 young men and 2 disabled young people.

It may be useful to think about the social norms that make it difficult for marginalised groups to participate and take steps to mitigate these. For example, in some communities, hosting all-female sessions may make it easier for participants to speak their mind.

Use specialist organisations or departments

Try to make use of specialist organisations that work with a particular group of young people, for example young people from a refugee background, or deaf young people.

Accessing young people through a trusted organisation with established reach can help to involve young people from a variety of backgrounds. It is also useful for sensitive topics and safeguarding to ensure the young person has an active relationship with a support professional.

See guidance on safeguarding

Getting them involved as early as possible will help to ensure that they have sufficient time to engage and prepare the young people in their networks.

You could also reach out to youth departments within local authorities. They often have a form of youth council or Youth Advisory Board that can be a good starting point.

Other trusted adults, such as youth workers, social workers or teachers can also help to identify and recruit young people.

'Snowballing', where one participant or trusted adult recruits the next, can also be effective and often works particularly well with young participants.

Advertise opportunities

Find out how the individuals you wish to speak to usually receive information in their communities and use these channels to reach participants. It is best to not rely solely on social media or word of mouth to advertise youth voice opportunities; circulate these in local newsletters or reach out to local youth organisations, schools and colleges.

Direct recruitment of young people may also be appropriate in some contexts, for example advertising a survey through social media adverts, or 'going where young people are' to speak at a youth club or other groups or settings where you can engage with young people directly. Consider safeguarding and consent, as well as government guidelines, when using direct recruitment.

Use clear and accessible communication

To make sure your recruitment materials are accessible, you might consider:

- using clear and simple language for all materials and communications
- translating materials for non-English speakers
- consider using video or audio formats ([see guidance on communication]) (#communication)

Mitigating barriers to engagement

Find the right location and time

Ask young people about their needs and preferences (location, time, in person vs. online, accessibility requirements) ahead of the engagement.

For in-person engagements, choose accessible locations and, where appropriate, familiar ones to the young people (consider where these groups would typically meet and go). This is particularly important for less mobile groups such as individuals with disabilities and those with less access to public transport.

Young people told us they often find it difficult to find time to attend engagement activities, particularly when timetabled events clash with school, college or their work.

It is best practice to work around young people's schedules and organise engagement opportunities outside of school/college hours where possible, for example, in the evenings or at the weekend during term time.

Be mindful of the school year cycle and avoid scheduling events during exams. For engagement taking place during school time, it may be helpful to provide the young person with a written letter detailing their participation that can be used when seeking permission to leave school.

It is best practice to

- where possible, offer multiple opportunities at a range of times in the day/week, both in-person and online
- aim to give the young person as much notice as possible, and let them know what they will be doing in advance of the session
- send helpful day-before and/or week-before reminders (without harassing)
- make yourself available to respond to questions, or, if this isn't possible, prepare a FAQ document in advance

Address financial barriers and reward participation

Engaging with policy officials involves young people giving up their time and often incurring costs, such as travel. They might need to take time away from education or employment in order to contribute. This is often particularly true for underrepresented groups.

It is a good idea to plan and budget to pay young people for their time, making sure they are not out of pocket. As a guide, the remuneration should be proportional to the amount of time given and the role and responsibilities of young people.

Ideally, you should provide young people with their preferred remuneration- often cash or BACS transfer. Where this is not possible, you may want to consider alternative methods, such as:

- vouchers/gift cards
- accreditation

- work experience

- membership to a rewards scheme

As a minimum, travel and other expenses should be reimbursed, and some young people may need these costs paid in advance of the engagement.

It is good to consider other provisions or equipment expenses that young people will need to cover and whether these will be reimbursed, for example:

- food and drink

- accommodation

- formal attire

- audio headset

- art supplies

It is helpful to communicate clearly about what remuneration or reimbursement can be provided to ensure transparency and manage expectations.

In addition to remuneration, you may want to think about what other incentives you can provide to encourage young people to participate. For some, a key incentive will be the potential to impact policy decisions they feel passionately about. It can help to ask young people what they're hoping to get out of the process.

For more information and best practice see Young Minds' guidance on rewarding participation.

Help young people feel prepared

Young people can feel they lack relevant subject expertise or have insufficient training to engage meaningfully on issues. Specifically, young people are concerned about not having sufficient understanding of research methods, the policy process and the context of issues they were discussing.

It is helpful to:

- provide context on the issue at hand, including the anticipated impact of their involvement

- consider the knowledge young people will need to engage and ensure that this information is provided in activities and/or resources

- be clear about what's expected and ask young people whether they have any concerns so that you can address these

- explain what platforms will be used and demonstrate how to use them

It is best to avoid jargon or buzzwords; instead, communicate things in simple language that is easy to understand.

Safeguarding

The National Youth Agency's 'Safeguarding standards for the youth sector' defines safeguarding as 'the action that is taken to promote the welfare of children and protect them from harm'.

For legal purposes, young people under the age of 18 are always considered 'children'. This means that any engagement should follow legal and statutory requirements for the safeguarding of a child's wellbeing and welfare. It is important to be aware of government guidance on working with children and young people and to get informed consent for participation in youth engagement.

Setting up safeguarding procedure

You should work with a specialist organisation to deliver engagement activities with participants under the age of 18 (or with additional needs and vulnerabilities). This will help to ensure that appropriate safeguarding measures are in place. The specialist organisation should have an up-to-date safeguarding policy, appropriate training and relevant procedures, which should be shared and discussed when planning engagement activities.

The safeguarding policy and procedures should be tailored to the age and specific needs of participants. You should work with the specialist organisation to identify potential risks and to agree reporting channels for any safeguarding concerns or if a young person makes a disclosure during the engagement. It may be appropriate for a youth worker or another appropriately trained trusted adult to accompany participants during the engagement so they can manage any safeguarding or risk issues and provide immediate or follow up support.

If engaging with young people face-to-face, special measures may need to be taken, such as having support workers present, additional training for conflict resolution, mental health or first aid.

Informed consent

In addition to gaining consent to participate from a parent or guardian for those under 18, you should also ensure that young people have given their 'informed consent' to participate.

Informed consent means making sure that young people know exactly what they are participating in, how their engagement will make a difference, and where their information or contributions may be used. You should always make sure to comply

with GDPR.

Youth sector organisations also recommend that young people have full control over how the data they contribute will be shared, including how it is presented in deliverables and reports.

All consent forms should include the following information:

- a detailed description of the engagement activity

- what is expected of the young people

- how you will keep their information safe and how long it will be stored under data protection

- how young people can access their information, and how they can request for it to be deleted or changed

- how participants can leave the session or engagement

Safeguarding checklist

Take these steps when preparing to work with young people:

- Consult [government guidance on working with children and young people](#).

- If working with a specialist organisation, make sure to review their safeguarding policy and work with them to agree safeguarding procedures for the engagement.

- Conduct a risk assessment for the engagement.

- Ensure that everyone involved, including young people, is aware of safeguarding policies and procedures and where to find them.

- Ensure that you, or a member of the specialist organisation that you are working with, have young people's emergency contact details to hand.

- Make sure to get informed consent for participation, including parental/guardian consent for those under 18.

- Employ appropriate additional safeguarding measures when working with particularly vulnerable young people such as those with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), disadvantaged young people, care-experienced young people or young carers.

Safeguarding resources and toolkits

- [Working together to safeguard children: statutory government guidance](#)

The National Youth Agency's Safeguarding and Risk Management Hub

provides a range of resources, including a basic introduction to safeguarding, guidance for digital youth work, and templates for consent and risk assessment forms

- [National Youth Agency safeguarding and risk management hub](#)

Other useful resources include:

- [Contextual safeguarding toolkits](#)
- [Girlguiding UK digital safeguarding policy](#) and [safe online toolkit](#)

↑ Back to top

Help us improve GOV.UK

To help us improve GOV.UK, we'd like to know more about your visit today. [Please fill in this survey (opens in a new tab)](#).

Services and information

Benefits

Births, death, marriages and care

Business and self-employed

Childcare and parenting

Citizenship and living in the UK

Crime, justice and the law

Disabled people

Driving and transport

Government activity

Departments

News

Guidance and regulation

Research and statistics

Policy papers and consultations

Transparency

How government works

Get involved