



Department  
for Culture,  
Media & Sport

Guidance

# How to work with young people in policy

Published 28 January 2026

## Applies to England

Contents

[Managing expectations](#)

[Ways of working](#)

[Establishing a relationship](#)

[Running a session](#)

[Inclusive communication and engagement](#)

[The feedback loop](#)

This guidance provides best practice information on how to work with young people in policy.

Effective youth engagement is not solely determined by the methods used, but also the quality of the engagement and the extent to which young people can influence a decision and contribute to a favourable outcome.

## Managing expectations

It's important to manage young people's expectations from the outset. This can be done by establishing a clear process for the engagement. It is important that participants understand their role, why they are being consulted, the scope of their involvement and where their input will impact decisions.

It is useful to explain in plain language:

- 1 Why we are here: the problem that you are trying to solve.

- 2 Why (and where) we need your input: why young people's opinions on the matter are important, where their input is needed, and if there is anything they won't be able to input on due to other constraints (and explain why).
- 3 What we are trying to achieve: what the outcome of the process will be.
- 4 How we will achieve this: the process from start to finish, including when to expect feedback on how their input has/hasn't been used and why.

You may want to explain what each person's role is, so that young people know who to turn to if they want to raise an issue, and to ensure transparency from the start. Consider presenting this information with visual aids such as flowcharts, illustrations, timelines or other graphics to ensure that young people fully understand the process.

Once the engagement is complete, it is a good idea to follow up with participants, making sure to:

- thank them for their time
- let them know the outcome of their participation
- include clear information on how their input impacted policy, where it could not be used and why

## Ways of working

When setting up an engagement with young people, it is best to establish ways of working and integrate this into your practice. This can include preferred methods or platforms, times and places for sessions, and any other accommodations that might help participants to feel more comfortable and supported throughout the engagement.

It is important that young people feel supported before, during, and after a session. It is best that they are able to contact you with any questions, follow-up comments or feedback. It is helpful to be clear from the outset what your expectations are in terms of timelines and next steps.

Try to leave any forums, discussion tools or channels of communication that were

used during the session open for a few days (ideally a week). This will allow participants to come back to the topics or tasks at a later date. It is best to be transparent about deadlines and cut-off points wherever applicable. If their input can only be incorporated up to a certain point, do make that clear to them.

## Establishing a relationship

It is important not to underestimate young people's capacity and willingness to engage in policy making. This can impact your relationship with young people during the engagement, and can have a knock-on effect on their confidence.

Young people want to feel respected, to engage in conversations as equals, and for their participation to be valued and impactful. Make sure to use appropriate language, and that your manner is friendly and engaging. Use a respectful tone to avoid young people feeling talked down to. If young people are to contribute in meaningful ways, they need to feel like their opinions are being heard and taken seriously.

The key is to establish a relationship as co-producers, so that you are working in partnership with the young people.

It is best to let young people set the tone, for example, by working with them to create a set of housekeeping rules or values underpinning the engagement. This can help them to feel trusted and supported from the start.

## Running a session

When planning the session, it is best to:

- let young people choose the setting for the engagement so they feel more comfortable in the environment. If the setting is too formal, they may feel intimidated and struggle to voice their ideas.
- be clear on the dress code in advance (if the engagement is taking place in-person)
- engage with young people in smaller groups, and keep the number of adults attending to a minimum.
- allow time before the session starts for young people to warm up and chat informally to each other.

During the session, try to:

- start with introductions and icebreakers to get young people talking and help them to feel comfortable
- let participants steer the tone of the engagement
- avoid talking at young people for long periods of time
- include a variety of ways for participants to contribute, don't rely too much on group discussions.
- provide plenty of opportunities for interaction and keep a good pace when moving between activities.
- make activities fun by using games and humour to establish rapport, build trust and break down barriers to engagement
- capture young people's input through note taking or other methods. This information should be shared with young people after the session.

## Inclusive communication and engagement

Inclusive engagement is essential to ensure that policies will meet the needs of all users. This is particularly true for policies designed to support or impact young people from under-represented communities.

### Before you start

Building a positive relationship and rapport starts at the recruitment stage. Developing trust and good communication with young people early on will help to ensure that they feel comfortable and committed to attending the engagement activity itself.

Before the engagement takes place, try to share key information about the topic and the engagement process, including any questions that young people will be asked. If possible, an introductory meeting can help to break down barriers by giving young people the opportunity to meet and get to know policy officials and to ask any questions that might help them to prepare.

If you are recruiting young people via a specialist organisation or department, make sure to discuss [safeguarding considerations](#) and data

protection considerations and to agree how you will communicate with young people. It is important that young people consent to being contacted and to participate in the engagement opportunity.

Throughout all stages of the engagement, make sure to avoid bias in favour of more confident young people and think about how to make conversations open and help participants to feel safe and comfortable to engage.

## Be clear

All communication should be clear, simple and age-appropriate, using language that is easy to understand. It can be helpful to provide examples or further explanation to help participants understand more complex topics, concepts or areas of policy.

A useful tip is to add a follow up sentence, starting with 'This means that'. For example,

'These processes set out the key principles that oversee [x] policy. This means that they determine the rules by which the policy will be managed.'

Clear communication does not mean 'dumbing things down' and it's important that young people do not feel patronised.

It is a good idea to:

- speak as you would to another adult in a casual environment.
- make use of youth advisory boards to proofread the language used in resources
- avoid slang or language that you think they might want to hear.

## Make resources accessible

To make sure your engagement resources are accessible to all young people, consider:

- splitting information up into shorter paragraphs, bullet points or as separate pages.
- translating materials for non-English speakers (and using a translator if needed during engagement sessions)

- making sure that materials and discussions are accessible for young people with a range of education and literacy levels.

## Use inclusive language

In order for young people to feel safe and comfortable, it is important to be aware of any potential sensitives or language that might cause offence. Avoid words and phrases that may be offensive or discriminatory.

Try to avoid:

- assuming pronouns based on appearance or gender identity
- using words like 'vulnerable', 'hard to reach' or 'at-risk' to describe young people

Instead, you should:

- be open to being challenged (and let young people know this)- for example, "If I say something you don't agree with, let me know"
- always double-check you have understood what young people are trying to say when engaging with them; avoid making assumptions

For additional tips and guidance, [see the Youth Engagement Resource Platform](#).

## Creating content for young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND)

To make content inclusive for young people with SEND, you should consider:

- asking them how they can be supported and what adjustments they need and making sure you have the time and resources to put them in place
- consulting partners that specialise in working with young people with SEND
- discussing their needs with other key adults in their lives (for example, parents, social workers, youth workers or teachers) and

working with them to create an adjustment plan, to help adapt engagement activities.

- allowing them to use preferred, accessible platforms to provide their input; if using discussion forums, leave them open for a few days post-engagement so they can come back and reflect- they may not have been able to concentrate on the day
- making sure visual materials are easy to read- consider the use of colour, font size, contrast and using alt text where needed
- reducing the length of activities to help with concentration

For an example of best practice, [see the Department for Education's easy-read version of the SEND and alternative provision improvement plan](#).

## Using digital platforms and resources

Online tools can be useful for creating engagement content for young people.

Consider using them for:

- running accessibility checks on your engagement materials
- creating online games and quizzes
- collaborative activities
- editing videos and creating digital art

When using social media platforms, make sure the engagement is safe and responsible. You will need to consider specific safeguarding measures. For more information, [see to the Safeguarding section](#). You may also wish to consult the Government Digital Service's '[Social media playbook](#)'.

For more information, [see Safeguarding guidance](#). You may also wish to consult the Government Digital Service's '[Social media playbook](#)'.

It is best to avoid using too many platforms or tools in one session, as this can be confusing for participants. Always provide user guidance for any platforms or tools that you are using and clear instructions for online activities. These should be shared in advance of the engagement, especially if participants will need to download something, create an account or familiarise themselves with a new platform or tool. Try to keep all of this information in one place, for example, on an email, so participants

know what they are meant to be doing and where to refer back to.

## The feedback loop

The table below outlines each stage of the feedback loop, a continuous cycle through which young people's input helps to shape and improve engagement activities and policy.

Stage	Description
Input	Engagement of young people in policy or research
Action	Work on incorporating young people's input into policy or practice
Follow up	Providing young people with feedback on how their input has been used and how their contributions helped to share the outcome. If no action was taken, explain why.
Review	What was the impact of the engagement activities on the young people, the policy officials and policy development, implementation or evaluation? What could be improved for next time?

It is important to keep open channels of communication with young people throughout the policy development cycle, this includes regular opportunities for participants to provide feedback on the engagement activities and process.

Regular feedback from young people about their experiences will help you to adapt and refine practices and to ensure that engagement activities are inclusive and meet the needs of all involved. This iterative process requires flexibility in the project plan and budget, particularly when the engagement is taking place over a period of time, for example, in a series of workshops or a youth advisory group.

Always ask young people what could be done better next time. You may want to use the structure 'You said, we did' as a method for demonstrating that you have listened to and acted upon feedback. As well as telling young people what you did as a result of their input, be as transparent as you can about the process. If some aspects of their input were not taken forward, try to tell them and explain why.

Examples of feedback mechanisms include:

- adding a slot to the beginning of each engagement for feedback and comments to be discussed. You can make a note of these and come back to them in the following session, outlining how you have addressed them (and if not, why), before asking for any new feedback or comments.

- sending out a feedback form after each session asking what went well and what can be improved for the next session. Make sure the form is written and formatted in an accessible way.
- using digital platforms to gather live feedback during the session.

Where possible, ask young people how they would like to be kept in the loop with regards to the impact of their participation and work with them to agree an approach.

You may also choose to share lessons learned from engaging with young people with colleagues and other teams.

## Providing feedback: best practice checklist

- 1 Have you set up and shared an ongoing feedback mechanism for young people to access throughout the engagement process? Check this periodically throughout the engagement.
- 2 Have you drafted and shared a more comprehensive feedback form to share after the engagement?
- 3 Have you shared the final policy or output with participants, highlighting where their feedback has been used (and if any feedback has not been incorporated, explaining why)?
- 4 Have you shared overall feedback and lessons learned from the engagement with your wider team, and externally with the young people, to make sure the process of engaging youth voice can be continually improved going forward?
- 5 Have you kept channels of communication open with young people throughout and after the engagement?

[↑ Back to top](#)

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](#)

[Education and learning](#)

[Employing people](#)

[Environment and countryside](#)

[Housing and local services](#)

[Money and tax](#)

[Passports, travel and living abroad](#)

[Visas and immigration](#)

[Working, jobs and pensions](#)

---

## Government activity

---

[Departments](#)

[News](#)

[Guidance and regulation](#)

[Research and statistics](#)

[Policy papers and consultations](#)

[Transparency](#)

[How government works](#)

[Get involved](#)

[Help](#) [Privacy](#) [Cookies](#) [Accessibility statement](#) [Contact](#) [Terms and conditions](#)

[Rhestr o Wasanaethau Cymraeg](#) [Government Digital Service](#)

**OGI** All content is available under the [Open Government Licence v3.0](#), except where otherwise stated



© Crown copyright