

# Social Care and Education Participation Approach

Ensuring children and  
young people realise their rights

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*Participation should be embedded in everything that we do and young people should be given choices and listened to.*

Professional working with children and young people

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# Introduction

**This document is designed to introduce services and their staff to an understanding of participation and best practice.**

## What is participation?

There are lots of different ways to define participation but at the heart it is all about being listened to and understood. In summary, participation includes:



**Having the opportunity to be involved in decision making.**



**Having a say in services that affect you.**



**Being able to influence and shape outcomes.**



**Being listened to and knowing what you say will be taken seriously.**



**Knowing what difference your views and ideas have made.**

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*I always remember the mantra, “nothing about us, without us”. Participation is the only way under 18s have a say.*

Professional working with children and young people

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*It is important that opportunities to participate are available to young people as this involves them in decision making.*

Young person

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*It's positive and healthy to have control over things that affect us otherwise it can feel like we have things happen to us and that we have no control.*

Young person

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## Why should young people participate?

For children and young people there are very clear laws which say they should have a right to participate. Article 12 of The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child says every young person has the right to express their views, feelings and wishes in all matters affecting them and to have those views considered and taken seriously.

The participation of young people is also protected by law in section 19 of the Children and Families Act 2014 and the Care Act 2014.

In addition to the law dictating that young people should be able to participate, there are also a number of benefits to young people and the organisation as a result of young people's participation.

### Benefits for young people

- Feeling respected and listened to.
- Building their self-confidence and self-esteem.
- Playing an active role in their community.
- Gaining new skills such as problem solving, decision making, negotiation, listening and communication.
- Improving services to meet their needs.

### Benefits for the organisation

- Planning, creating and shaping better quality services that meet the needs of young people.
- Improving the quality of life for young people by services recognising, understanding and responding to their needs.
- Improving decision making.
- Making practice more inclusive.

## Barriers to participation

Despite the importance of participation, there can be a number of barriers which prevent meaningful participation. For example:

- Young people are unaware of their right to participate.
- Staff are not aware of young people's right to participate.
- There are not structures in place to respond to young people's ideas.
- Young people do not have all the information they need to participate.
- Decisions made through the participation process are not put in place.

In order to avoid these barriers and realise the benefits, a considered approach to participation must be followed.



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*We have a duty to ensure that young people can voice their concerns and have them taken seriously. Participatory approaches also ensure that our support and projects are genuinely meeting the needs of YP and are maximising the impact for vulnerable children and young people.*

Professional working with children and young people

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*An individual needs to feel empowered when making decisions about their future. The voice of the individual has to be paramount for the planning of that individual's future.*

Professional working with children and young people

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*It was an amazing feeling, having the chance to have my voice heard about what kind of people should be working around me.*

Young person

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# Participation at Leicester City Council

## What model of participation will inform practice in Leicester City?

There are lots of different ways for children and young people to be involved in the work we do. Sometimes the idea of a ladder is used to show different 'levels' of participation. Though this model is useful in showing types of participation to avoid, it also suggests that some ways of participating work better than others.

In Leicester City we want our participation practice to be rights based, and the model that fits best for us is the Lundy Model of Participation. This model provides a way of seeing children's and young people's rights to participation, as laid down in Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. It is intended to focus adults in charge on the separate parts of the provision.

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*Participating in decision making gives us the chance to be in control of our own lives.*  
Young person

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*It gives me the chance to express what I'm thinking and how I feel.*  
Young person



*The Lundy Model of Participation*

## Inclusion and diversity

We are committed to ensuring all those we work with are supported to engage at a level they feel works for them. This approach will enable us to create an inclusive culture that encourages, supports, and celebrates the diverse voices of all the children and young people we work with.

## How will we ensure real participation in Leicester City?

As outlined through the Lundy Model of participation, there are four stages we must make sure happen to enable all children and young people to be heard. This applies to our formal participation groups as well as our direct work with individual children and young people. These stages are:

- **Space:** Children and young people must have access to safe spaces to meet so they have equal opportunities to formulate and express views.
- **Voice:** Children and young people must be supported to make their voice heard and express their views in a way that they decide is best.
- **Audience:** We must ensure that children and young people's voices will be listened to by the most appropriate audience.
- **Influence:** We must ensure that children and young people are able to have influence and have their views acted upon. Where appropriate, staff who work with children and young people will show them how they have influenced decisions about their lives. It is important that we explain clearly to children and young people when decisions made about them are different to what they said they wanted.

## What are the different focuses of participation?

Just as people can participate in lots of different ways, participation can have different focuses. For example, participation might be individual, operational or strategic as summarised in the table below. All are valid focuses and Leicester City Council is committed to ensure that children and young people are involved at all three levels.



### Individual

- Decisions relate directly to the participants' own lives.
- Decisions are made about day to day activities.
- Outcomes primarily impact the individual.



### Operational

- Decisions relate to planning, delivery and evaluation.
- The activity aims to improve the quality of service provision.
- Outcomes affect the individual and other service users.



### Strategic

- Decisions relate to long term planning.
- The activity includes meaningful roles in priority setting, monitoring and designing services.
- Outcomes influence policy and practice.

## Ensuring young people can participate

Leicester City Council will ensure that young people have plenty of opportunities to participate and have made a number of commitments to support young people's involvement.

**Space:** We will provide a safe and inclusive space for young people to express their views.

We will do this by:

- Hosting formal participation groups for young people that work with council decision makers to scrutinise, evaluate and help plan services.
- Advocating for those children and young people who are looked after or who are involved in child protection processes.
- Providing opportunities for young people to get involved in projects with the council.
- Making sure that the staff who work with young people always put them at the centre of their decision making, meet young people in places accessible to them and give young people time to understand what is happening.
- Actively seeking the views of young people.

**Voice:** We will ensure that young people can express their views in a way they decide is best.

We will do this by:

- Training young people when they join our formal groups.
- Making sure that staff support young people to understand the processes they are part of.
- Using resources and tools that are creative and age appropriate.
- Being honest with young people about what can and cannot be changed.

**Audience:** We will ensure that what young people say is listened to by the most appropriate people.

We will do this by:

- Making sure our formal participation groups have regular access to senior managers.
- Supporting young people to make a complaint if they feel aggrieved.
- Ensuring workers who work with young people will listen to them, make time for them to say what they think and share the young people's views with managers if appropriate.
- Advocating on behalf of young people when requested.

**Influence:** We will ensure that young people's views are taken seriously and acted upon.

We will do this by:

- Actioning recommendations from our formal participation groups and always explaining if we cannot make changes.
- Making sure that any plans about young people are shaped by what they say.

**Impact:** We will ensure that young people know how they are making a difference.

We will do this by:

- Completing the Hear By Right assessment framework.
- Inviting young people to evaluate services they receive and feedback their opinions.
- Auditing case recordings.
- Providing feedback about decisions made.

# Opportunities for participation

At Leicester City Council there are already a number of opportunities for young people to participate in work, at both an individual level and through more formal participation groups.

## Individual participation

### All children and young people

Leicester City Council practises a strength-based model called Signs of Safety and using this model, we make sure that all children and young people who receive a service from Leicester City Council will have a say in their plans. All young people should be able to see the difference made to services they receive. They will be supported in age appropriate ways and with resources and tools that are creative and age appropriate.

### Children and young people who are looked after or in children protection processes

**Children's Rights:** We help resolve issues of conflict or disagreement, assist young people in understanding their rights and support young people to make complaints.

**Advocacy:** We help young people to understand their rights, support young people to have a say during reviews and meetings so their voice is heard and helps to shape plans.

## How will you hear me?

To ensure that all staff understand participation and it is delivered consistently across all work we have a participation training resource called 'How will you hear me?'

This training toolkit and its accompanying films will be used in workforce development sessions, we promise to keep the toolkit updated and to add new films as and when necessary.

## Other participation

Further to these existing mechanisms, staff across the Social Care and Education department may also develop specific participatory activities to support opportunities for young people to have their voices heard in certain projects.

This approach sets out the general principles for what good participation work looks like, establishing clear definitions of truly participatory activity and spelling out standards to be followed to ensure best practice. Any service area preparing to seek young people's views and involve young people in some manner should be mindful of this guidance when planning participatory activity.

Individual service areas are responsible for developing specific plans which outline the methods through which young people will be involved and which are mindful of addressing the established standards. A brief template is provided for staff to use when planning to lead participatory activity in order to help ensure that practice meets this guidance. Please see Appendix I.



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*Children are active citizens of this city and can bring fresh ideas and perspectives to the fore.*

Professional working with children and young people

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*Children and Young people need to be part of decision making to ensure this supports their needs being met.*

Professional working with children and young people

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*Participation helps improve the services I am involved in planning. Gives young people a say in their services so they feel respected and allows them to play an active role.*

Professional working with children and young people

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# Standards for good participation

Any activity supporting the involvement of young people in Leicester City Council's activity should meet the following ten standards. This will help to ensure that there is a consistent approach to offering meaningful participatory opportunities to Leicester's young people.



**The Basics:** Ensure basic requirements are met to enable young people to take part, for example being mindful of timings and having an accessible location.



**Choice:** Young people should always have a choice whether they want to get involved in decision-making processes. This means knowing what a commitment involves and being able to make an informed decision.



**Feedback:** Young people should receive feedback about the impact of their participation in a timely manner. They should be clear about what is going to happen in response to their participation and any decisions made.



**Inclusivity:** Young people of all abilities and circumstances should have the right to have a say and get involved in decisions that affect their lives.



**Information:** Young people should be informed in a clear way (taking account of age, language, disability, and access) and from the outset, what level of influence they will have in any participatory activity.



**Notice:** Sufficient notice should be given to young people (and their parents/carers where necessary) when they are going to be asked to be actively involved.



**Recognition:** Participants should be celebrated and their achievements recognised.



**Remuneration:** Where required, participants should be able to claim expenses.



**Respect:** Young people's contributions must be afforded the same level of respect as those contributions made by professionals.



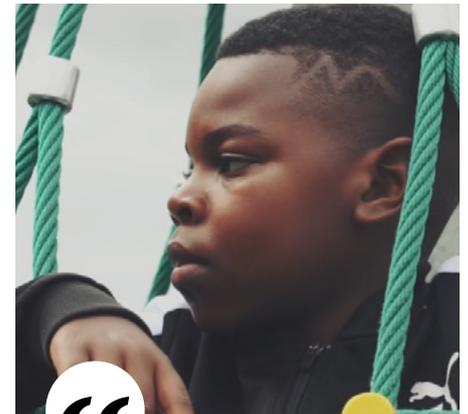
**Support:** Young people should receive any training or development required to ensure they are able to appropriately take part and staff are trained to support young people's involvement.

# Appendix I: Template for planning participation activity involving young people

Activity title	
Project lead	

Description of activity	Outline what you plan to do with the young people to get them involved. Identify who will be involved – to include the age profile and whether there any additional needs. Be clear in what support will be provided by staff.
Aims of activity	Outline the aims of the participatory activity, be clear on what the outcomes hoped for are.

How we will provide a safe and inclusive space for young people to express their views.	Detail how you will make sure that young people have a safe space to express their views.
How we will ensure young people can express their views in a way that they decide is best.	Detail how you will make sure that young people are able to express their views in a way they decide is best.
How we will ensure that what young people say is listened to by the most appropriate people.	Detail how you will make sure that young people’s views are listened to by the most appropriate audience.
Detail how you will make sure that young people’s views are taken seriously and acted upon.	How you will ensure that young people’s views are taken seriously and acted upon.
How we will ensure that young people know how they are making a difference.	Detail how you will feedback to young people so they know how they are making a difference.



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*I think every young child should be able to participate because that way it doesn’t make anyone feel left out or not equal.*  
 Young person

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*When you find new ways to hear, you hear new things.*  
 Young person

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*When I feel listened to, I feel respected and I feel cared for.*  
 Young person

## Checklist

	Do the basic arrangements enable young people to take part?
	Do young people have a choice about whether they want to get involved?
	Is it clear how feedback will be provided to young people afterwards?
	Can young people of all abilities and circumstances get involved?
	Do young people have all the information they need to participate?
	Have young people been given sufficient notice about their involvement?
	Will participants' achievements be recognised?
	Are arrangements in place for participants to be remunerated if needed?
	Will young people's contributions be afforded with respect?
	Have participants and staff got the skills needed to enable young people to take part?