THE SHOOGLE LAB

CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE'S Commissioner Scotland

Fixing the feedback loop



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Introduction from the Commissioner



One of my office's strategic priority issues is education, as laid out in our Strategic Plan 2024-28, which was informed by the views and experiences of children and young people across Scotland. All children have the right to an education that develops their personality, talents, and abilities to their full potential.

Children are experts on how they experience the education system. They are its ultimate stakeholders and they have been very clear that they want change in education to be a priority. However, there is currently no consistent or systematic way of gathering their views and ensuring this drives the education reform plans at a local, regional or national level. Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) on a child's right to participation is well known; we have been working on it in relation to education.

We have held a series of sessions where children, young people and education leaders come together. This collaboration – called the Shoogle Lab – aims to look at what might need a 'shake up'; both small changes, and more seismic shifts. To support this, I asked global participation expert Professor Laura Lundy to explain the benefits of embedding the right to participation in education at all levels. Since then, she has been working with my Young Advisors to produce this new resource on why giving feedback to children on what they are telling us is so important, and how best to do that.

Nicola Killean
Children and Young People's Commissioner Scotland

Fixing the feedback loop



Professor Laura Lundy

One of the ongoing challenges in delivering meaningful child participation is the failure to demonstrate what has happened to children's views when they have shared them with public decision-makers. Twenty years ago, when I was creating what is now known as the Lundy model, I looked, quite briefly in retrospect, at what was involved in demonstrating 'influence'. I landed, as others have done, on the importance of feedback, seeing it then as a way of providing procedural justice in the context of child participation.

I revisited this in 2018 in an article where I looked at what is and isn't tokenistic activity and what could be put in place to ensure de-tokenisation. Here I suggested that feedback could play a truly crucial role in addressing tokenistic approaches to child participation. Human rights law is ultimately about State accountability – duty-bearers fulfilling their obligations to rights-holders, including children. Feedback – the point at which duty-bearers explain to children what they did with children's views – seems to me to be the critical juncture of human rights accountability. And yet, it is so often omitted or done poorly with the result that children are left with no sense of what impact, if any, their views have had.

As part of the Shoogle Lab programme, the Children and Young People's Commissioner has brought together children and education duty-bearers to explore the challenges and barriers to delivering inclusive participation in education for all children.

Feedback was highlighted as one of the issues by both children and duty-bearers, and that's why we have revisited this together. We wanted to explain why it is critical and to explore a potential framework for delivering good feedback as part of a national approach.

Why is feedback important to children and young people?

The Commissioner's Young Advisors discussed what accountability meant to them and decided that it included:

- adults explaining to children and young people what is happening with their views, and
- adults taking responsibility for their actions

One said: "Adults being accountable in education means taking responsibility for actions and being reliable. If you say something, do something."

Adults should give feedback so they can show what they are doing with what children said. The Young Advisors consider feedback to be important for the following reasons:

"We need to be understood rather than just heard. When adults give feedback they should clearly explain what can, and cannot be done and the reasons why. It manages expectations honestly and builds trust. By explaining what was actually done, it demonstrates that children's voices lead to real outcomes. This encourages us all to continue sharing ideas and keep taking an active role."

"Adults need to make the whole process more transparent by showing not only what decisions are made but why they are made, helping children understand the reasoning behind them."

"Reliability. Trust. Reliability leads to trust. Trust links to listening."

"If you are not doing it, what is the point?"

The 4 Fs of feedback

Harnessing the frustration sometimes expressed by children, in 2018 I created a framework for feedback that would provide transparency and accountability and, importantly, allow the participation dialogue to continue. I suggested that feedback should comply with four 'Fs':

Fast: Timely so children can see the result of their participation quickly.*

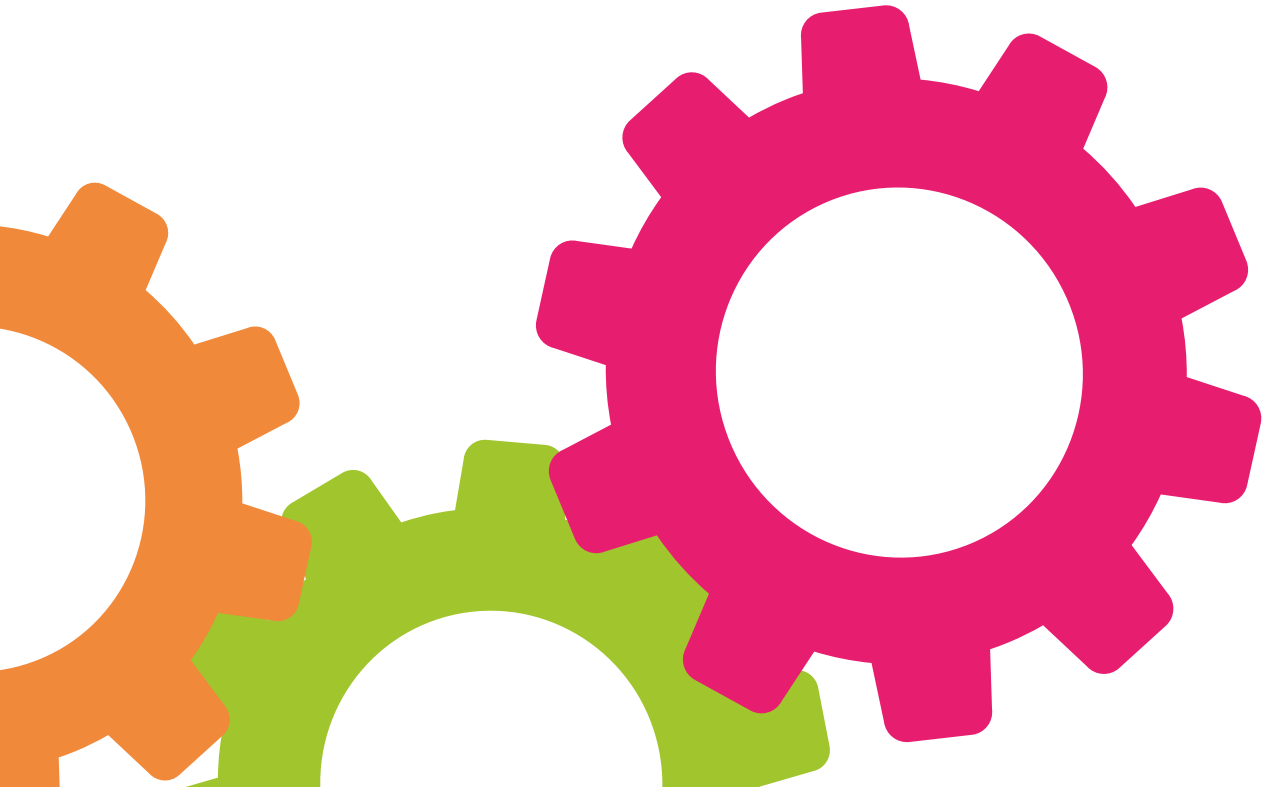
Full: A thorough and engaged consideration of the views expressed, answering the following questions.

- What did you agree with?
- What, if anything, surprised you and why?
- Did you disagree with anything? If so, what and why?
- Has it influenced your views in any way? If so, how?
- What have you decided?
- What is happening next and when will it happen?

Child-Friendly: Communication that is understandable to the children involved. It should be age-appropriate, accurate, accessible, appealing. See page 7 for more information.

Follow-up: Ongoing engagement regarding the impact of their input.

* Giving "fast" feedback should not be confused with fast implementation. Many adults say it can be difficult to give fast feedback when change takes time, but this conflates communication with action. Both need to be done, but communication can happen faster.



The Four As of child-friendly communication

Age appropriate

Do:

- use simple, clear language and short sentences
- explain difficult words
- give examples

Do not:

- make it too long – aim for one to four pages maximum
- make it too simple – don't patronise them

Accurate

Do:

- keep to the original meaning
- check back with the authors to be sure
- use examples to clarify the meaning

Do not:

- overgeneralise if it means that it might be misinterpreted
- include children's suggestions if the result will make the text inaccurate



Accessible

Do:

- use a font of at least 12pt
- include alternative texts for all images/icons

Do not:

- centre or justify the text
- use italics or capitalise whole words
- have complicated or irrelevant images

Appealing

Do:

- use colour
- include appropriate images

Do not:

- have long documents of black and white text
- use images that are for decoration only or are too childish

There is guidance on how to put this into practice.

Good and bad feedback

The Young Advisors discussed examples of good and bad feedback from their experiences.

Good feedback: connected; consistent, regular; clear timeline; specific; taking criticism; including examples; using varied communication methods; involving children; easy to understand; accessible and not too vague.

> **"The best feedback has timelines that we can follow along and check up on it. I'd also say don't take our opinions to heart, it's not personal if we criticise, we just want things to get better."**

> **"Good feedback needs to be a balance of being informative but don't give us too much information. We don't want too much mush!"**

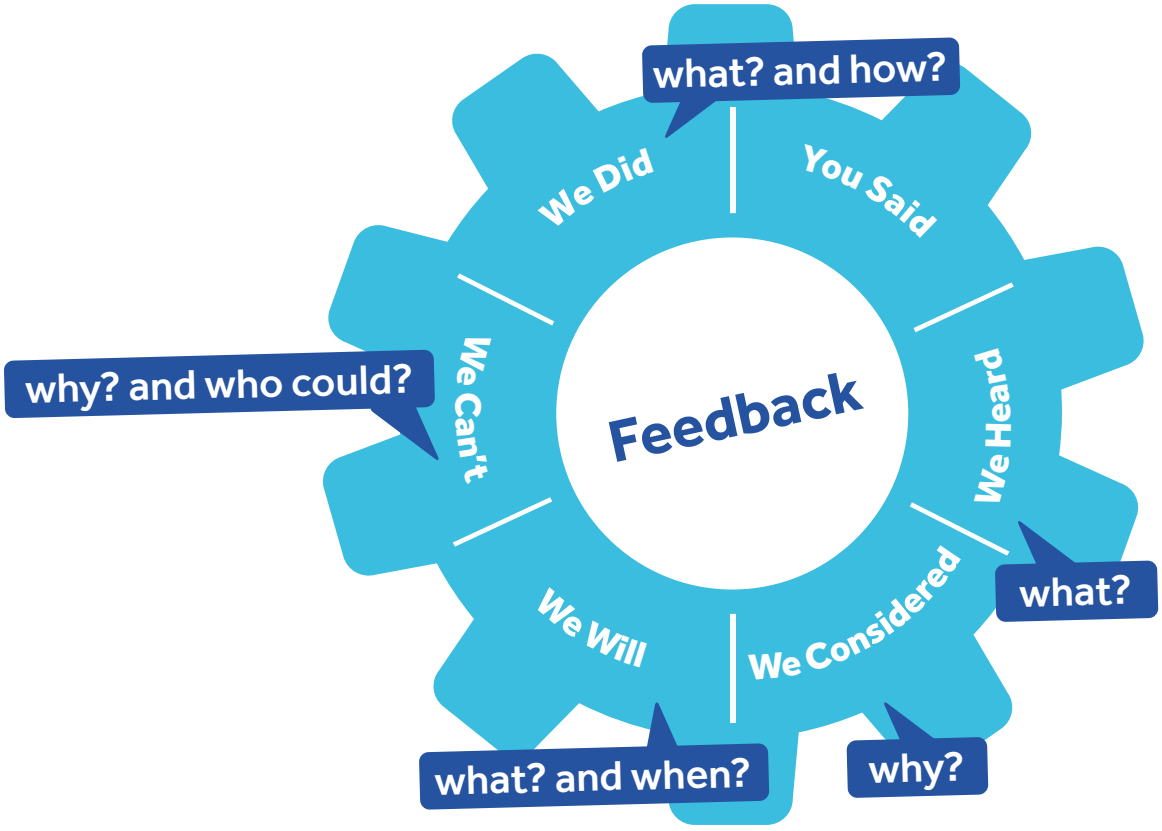
Bad feedback: none; one word; mush; not child-friendly; no real change; don't take criticism or accept failings; blaming others; passing the problem.

> **"It's far too normalised to pour your heart out with the school leaders and then to just hear no more about it."**

> **"I went to a really big event. It felt important. But we were given no more information back from that."**

The Young Advisors then turned their attention to an activity that is often used for feedback which is called "You said, we did". They thought that this was a good start but not enough. They developed a more detailed feedback loop.

The Young Advisors' feedback loop



At a Shoogle Lab session, Young Advisor Aisha explained their feedback loop and gave helpful guidance on how to use it.

"Some adults use an approach called "You said, we did" after listening to children's views. While this is good, we feel it is not enough, so we have started to develop a more detailed feedback loop that gives children a clearer understanding of what has been heard, what has been considered, and what actions have been taken.

This approach ensures that children can confirm whether their ideas have been understood in the way they intended, creating a more transparent and meaningful process:

1. You said

This is where a child (or group of children) shares a suggestion, concern, or idea.

2. We heard (what?)

This is where the adults restate the suggestion in their own words to confirm understanding.

For example, "This is what we think you meant..."

Children can then agree or clarify.

3. We considered (why?)

This is where the adults explain the possible options they explored and why these were considered.

For example, "We looked at these ideas because..."

4. We will (what? and when?)

This is where the adults explain what action is realistic and can be taken and when this could happen.

For example, "We will do this by..."

5. We can't (why? and who could?)

This is where if something isn't possible, adults explain honestly why, and if there is someone else who may be able to might help.

For example, "We can't do this because... but you could speak to..."

6. We did (what? and how?)

This is where adults explain what was actually done and how it was achieved.
For example, "Here's what we did..."

Then back to 1.

This approach is better because it ensures that children are understood rather than just heard, as adults are able to actively check their interpretation of what has been said and gives children the chance to clarify.

This makes the whole process more transparent by showing not only what decisions are made but why they are made, helping children understand the reasoning behind certain actions.

By clearly explaining what can and cannot be done, and the reasons for this, it manages expectations honestly and builds trust.

By explaining what was actually done, it demonstrates that children's voices lead to real outcomes, encouraging them to continue sharing their ideas and take an active role in their environment.

The response from duty-bearers

Commissioner Nicola Killean

In March 2026, we supported the Young Advisors to present the feedback loop to education leaders from Qualifications Scotland (QS), His Majesty's Inspectorate of Education in Scotland (HMIE), General Teaching Council for Scotland (GTCS), and a number of education authorities.

We asked some simple questions: What do you like about this? What are the challenges? Would you use this model in your organisation?

The response was thoughtful and resoundingly positive. We asked each organisation to leave with an action: to discuss the model internally with colleagues, capture the positives and any challenges of using it, and report back.

This is a work in progress but so far, we are seeing some very real opportunities to test this model in major education organisations, and clusters of education settings.

After discussing the model, organisations shared their positive reflections including that it:

- expands and deepens discussion between adults and young people
- can be added into structures that are already there
- can be used at the beginning of a process and throughout to assess progress
- has a structure that supports working with individuals or groups

Qualifications Scotland plans to use the feedback model across different departments and strategic initiatives. They referenced how it can be used by their Learner Committee: "We will set out with the ambition to use the 4Fs and 4As framework as a simple way to reflect on how well learner feedback is being incorporated. After three or four meetings, both committee members and learners could use the framework to consider whether the learners feel listened to, whether their views have been taken seriously, and whether actions or changes have followed."

Clackmannanshire Council reflected that the model supports "more natural, meaningful dialogue" and that it "would support consistency and familiarity, contributing to greater impact in our decision-making process".

Falkirk Council shared views from schools that explored the model: "They could clearly see how this helps to close the communication feedback loop. They felt there was significant potential in empowering young people to make informed decisions. It was seen as particularly helpful in

situations where a 'no' response is required...They loved the sense of activism built into the model, with young people genuinely leading change."

There have been some useful suggestions of what to consider building on the model:

- how to ensure that feedback is strong, even when organisations are gathering views through commissioning other organisations

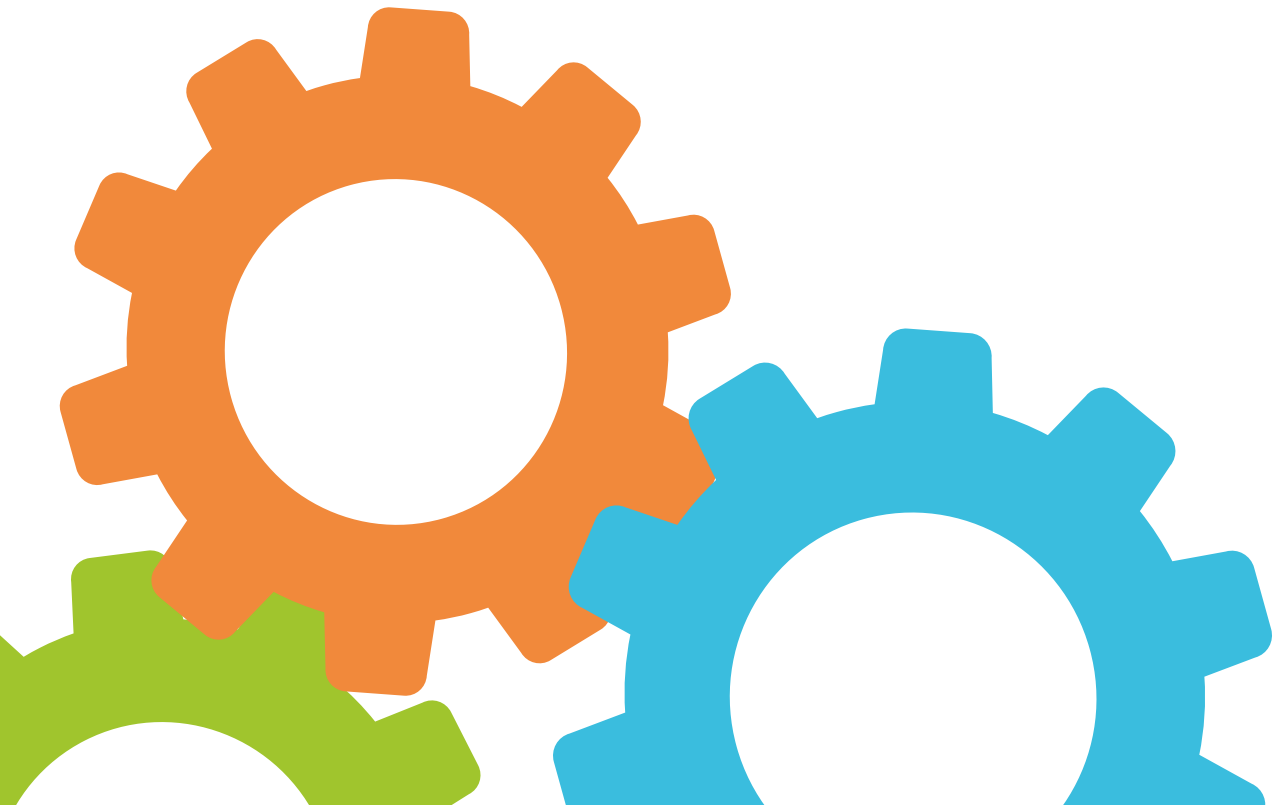
- how to develop the model's use with children in the early years and children with additional support needs

What is clear from the responses so far is that those who are engaging with this are understanding it as a way in which communication with children and young people becomes more open, more transparent, and can build trust.

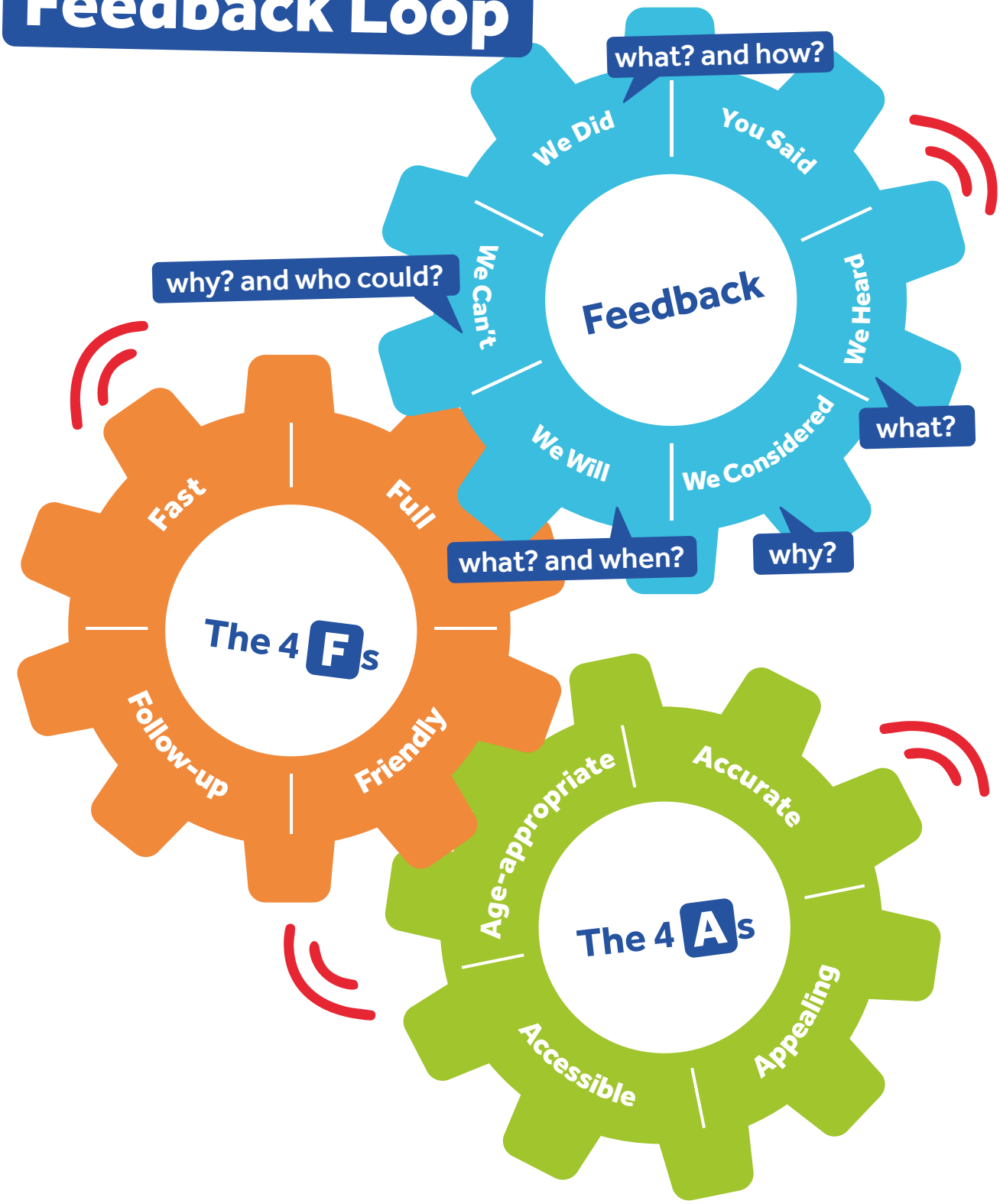
The commitments to test this model are concrete steps forward, but there is still some way to go to ensure every child in Scotland enjoys their rights to participation in education. Co-ordination will be critical and I will be pushing for education leaders to focus on this as we continue this work.

But don't wait, just try it.

We know there are people at local, regional and national levels who are innovating and leading change. This improved feedback loop can be put to work straight away to help adults to show children and young people the importance of their views, how they have been given due weight, and how they are influencing decisions.



Children and Young People Feedback Loop



This model brings together all the elements: the Young Advisors' feedback loop with the 4Fs and 4As.

About Professor Lundy

Laura Lundy is Honorary Professor of Education Law and Children's Rights at Queen's University, Belfast, Professor of Law at University College Cork and a barrister at law. She is co-Editor in Chief of the International Journal of Children's Rights. Her expertise is in law and human rights with a particular focus on children's right to participate in decision-making and education rights. Her 2007 paper in the British Educational Research Journal, "'Voice' is not enough" is one of the most highly-cited academic papers on children's rights ever. The model of children's participation it proposes (based on four key concepts – Space, Voice, Audience and Influence) is used extensively in scholarship and practice. The "Lundy Model" has been adopted by numerous national governments, including Ireland in its national strategy and framework on child and youth participation, as well as international organisations including the European Commission, Council of Europe, and UNICEF.

About the Children and Young People's Commissioner

Nicola Killean is the Children and Young People's Commissioner for Scotland. She became the Commissioner in August 2023 and has a six-year term. The Commissioner works with her team to promote and protect the rights of children and young people in Scotland. That is:

- everyone under 18, and
- everyone up to 21 who is in care or care experienced

The law that created the Commissioner's role says that the Commissioner must:

- Promote awareness and understanding of children's rights.
- Involve children and young people in the Office's work.
- Make sure laws, policies and practice affecting children and young people's lives are fair and respect their rights.
- Promote and carry out research to progress children's rights.
- Share examples of adults working well to fulfil children's rights so others can learn from it.

The Commissioner also has legal powers which we can use in some situations where we are concerned that human rights promises to children and young people are not being kept. We use these powers of investigation and litigation (taking action in court) when we think we can make a bigger change that lots of children can benefit from. There are rules about when we can do an investigation. We must not duplicate the work of another Office, and we cannot investigate when it is an issue that is reserved to the UK Parliament. Our Office's role is to hold people in power to account and to take action when children's rights are breached.

About the Young Advisors

The Commissioner works with a group of Young Advisors who are passionate human rights defenders, aged 12-17. They guide, influence, and shape her work.

Eight Young Advisors have been working on The Shoogle Lab project since October 2025 – Aisha, Arrianna, Elsie, Grace, Phoebe, Robert, Saif, and Sam. We are so grateful to them for their commitment, input, ideas, and enthusiasm.



CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE'S Commissioner Scotland

Bridgeside House
99 McDonald Road
Edinburgh EH7 4NS

Tel: 0131 346 5350
Young Persons' Freephone: 0800 019 1179
Email: administration@cypcs.org.uk
cypcs.org.uk

@cypcs @cypcs /cypcs

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