THE SHOOGLE LAB

CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE'S Commissioner Scotland

Participation in education

A good practice guide developed with children and young people



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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.



Introduction

During 2025–26, we worked with children, young people, and education leaders to explore how the right to participation can be realised across Scotland's education system for all children in an inclusive way. This was explored through 'the Shoogle Lab' where the Commissioner and our Young Advisors identify issues that need shaking up with leaders responsible for delivering change.

While examples of good practice in education were identified, these were not consistent experiences for children. This raised the question of whether there is a limited shared understanding of what "good" participation is, particularly from children and young people's perspectives.

What we did

We gathered children and young people's views on what meaningful participation should look like in education settings. We worked with over 90 children and young people from Primary 5 to S5, and with young carers, and children with additional support needs. This was across eight groups using an iterative and reflective approach to session design to improve quality and accessibility. We used creative methods and worked in large and small group approaches.

How the guide was developed

Our discussions were structured around the Lundy Model of Child Participation: Space, Voice, Audience and Influence. Children and young people identified strengths in current practice and set out clear suggestions for what could be added, changed or improved to create a better participation experience. Using the Lundy Model, we have summarised the key themes, supported by children's views.

How to use this guide

This guide gives a practical framework to inform consistent rights-based participation across education.

It can be used to help you reflect on how the children and young people you work with are currently involved in informing decisions. It gives an opportunity to look at what current practice is, alongside what children and young people say they need for their participation to feel good and be meaningful.

Delivering good participation needs careful planning, skill development, and practice - there are lots of incredible practitioners, including those working in the third sector, early years and youth work across Scotland who can offer support.

But ultimately the children or young people you are planning to work with are the best people to tell you if what you are doing is working for them. Use this guide to ask them, and listen to what they have to say.

Space: Children must be given safe, inclusive opportunities to form and express their view

What we asked

- How can children and young people feel safe to express their views?
- Where are the spaces you feel most heard?

What we heard

Trust is needed.

"Trust is built – isn't something that just happens."

"Knowing that no one will judge your view."

"To be able to kinda be able to speak without being laughed at during classroom discussions."



Physical environments can make a difference.

This includes which space is used and how it is set up for participation work. Children want opportunities for quiet, separate and private places and spaces to share views. Many children gave a clear preference for meeting in person but also liked the flexibility of meeting online.

"More comfortable, less clinical environment."

"A relaxing space."

"Quiet is really important for focusing."

"Have toys to help concentrate."

"The sensory room."

"It's comfy, comfy things."

Physical spaces where trusted adults work are key.

All groups identified physical spaces within education settings where they could speak to a particular trusted adult.

"The library."

"Miss X's classroom."

"My music teacher welcomes my ideas and lets my creativity grow again after being broken."



Time and space to think.

Children need time to process and contribute their views. They also sense when adults are not really listening to them.

"Make time for us."

"Let them explain things in own time."

"Someone who is actively interested in what someone has to say."

"Stop what they are doing and fully listen."

Things that don't make children feel this is a space to share.

"[Don't] put words in mouths."

"Eye rolling."

"Don't go on a call or send an email when you try to talk."

Voice: Children must be facilitated to express their view

What we asked

- How are you provided with the support you need to give your views and be heard about the things that matter to you?
- How are you offered, or how would you like to be offered, different ways of giving your views?
- How do you know when someone is listening to you?

What we heard

Flexibility and creativity in hearing and capturing views.

Children and young people shared a variety of ways in which they would want to and do share their views.

"Speaking in my own way."

"Text/type/write/draw/art/music/surveys."

"Using anonymous platforms so you feel comfortable."

"Flexibility in what they can talk about."

"You don't need to talk if you don't want to."

"Voting on the iPad."

"QR Code."

"A microphone and a speaker."

Relationships and skilled responses are essential.

Trusted relationships and knowing they would not be judged or receive a negative response for expressing their views were important to children. This supports them to share their voice.

"Someone who is actively interested in what someone has to say."

"Show that they're listening through body language and responses."

"Talking to a trusted adult."

"Give reassurance, tell us we can speak freely and we are not being judged."

"Not being annoyed when we ask for clarification."

"Teachers listening and not just shouting and shutting it down."

Privacy and confidentiality must be explained, and one-to-one participation options may be more important for some children.

This was an important theme for young people who wanted reassurance on privacy and confidentiality. Children who are young carers, and children with additional support needs particularly expressed the need for one-to-one opportunities to speak to a trusted adult to give their views.

"Talk to teacher out of class."

"One-to-one."

"Private rooms where nobody can hear and the person inside does not judge."

"Talking to someone in private."

Peer-led structures can help.

Children and young people identified structured ways of discussing issues with their peers.

"Speaking to a member of pupil leadership."

"Pupil council meeting."

"Pupil Voice."

They also identified personal peer relationships as spaces where they felt heard, such as "on the phone with my pals" and "in the toilets with friends", and that shared experiences helped discussions feel like safe spaces where they are "surrounded by people with similar experiences".



Audience: The view must be listened to

What we asked

- Who are the people who are listening?
- Who are the people who should be listening?

What we heard

Relationships and trusted individuals.

Positive listening experiences were linked to feeling respected and not judged.

"Teachers (nice ones)."

"People you trust."

"My mum and gran."

"My RMPS teacher... never judges my answer... she listens no matter what."

Specific adults within education settings.

Key roles were particularly mentioned, and children and young people highlighted the importance of being heard by staff who can act.

"Head Teacher spreading awareness for suggestions being implemented."

"Guidance."

"School counsellor and nurse."

"Senior leadership team."



Wider systems and power.

The ability of people to influence change was important.

"Scottish Government."

"Council."

"The police."

"People in power."

"It doesn't matter to me who they are as long as they have the power to make a difference."

Collective listening. Children expressed the importance of feeling heard in all spaces in life.

"Everyone should be listening to you."

"Everybody, everyone."

"As many people as possible until I am heard."





Influence: The view must be acted upon

What we asked

- Why is feedback important?
- How do you hear about the impact of your views?
- What helps you know if your participation has made a difference?

What we heard

Transparency and honesty must be there.

This is even more important when giving feedback about why something has or hasn't happened.

"Even if it doesn't happen, we should know."

"Explain why/why not."

"WHY when an action has not been taken."

"Telling me it's been taken into consideration."

Clear, communication in places children and young people are – and where they look for information.

Communication was identified as best when it is in different ways to ensure it is accessible.

"Assembly."

"Pupil bulletin."

"Email."

"Video."

"Announcements on social media."

"Private talk."

"A meeting with Head Teacher."

"Come into class and tell us."

Visible change and proof of impact.

Children can see and feel the changes they have suggested.

"Changes are made."

"Seeing it around you."

"If your suggestion suddenly happens."

"Take action on the things you speak about."

"Decisions being made soon after your suggestion."

Explain and check if children and young people understand decisions.

Making changes or decisions need to be explained to children.

"Tell us why rules are in place, so we understand."

"Asking if they understand."

Accountability and follow-up.

Giving children feedback, and keeping them updated is essential.

"Take our opinions on board and update us."

"We want to know what you have done with what I say."

"When will we hear about the change?"

"If there is an alternative... tell us."

"Don't give up so easily if it is hard."

Feedback loop model

We have worked with our Young Advisors and Professor Laura Lundy to develop a feedback loop model. This will help you deliver feedback in a meaningful way to children and young people.

Explore the feedback loop model



Thank you

Thank you to all the children and young people who spent time with us to talk about their experiences and share their ideas to help improve participation in education decision-making.

- Buckhaven Primary
- Bun-sgoil Ghàidhlig a' Challtainn
- Carers Trust Scotland (Angus, Clackmannanshire, Edinburgh, Falkirk)
- Inclusion Ambassadors
- Kennoway Primary
- Levenmouth Academy
- My Rights, My Say Ambassadors
- Williamston Primary
- Windsor Park School

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