

5.4 Young people's participation in policy-making

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Formal Mechanisms of Consultation

The United Kingdom is a signatory to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child ([UNCRC](#)). Article 12 of the UNCRC affirms that:

‘States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.’

In practice, this involves an emphasis on consulting young people and encouraging their involvement in local democratic processes and decision making.

Specific reference to Article 12 of the UNCRC is made in 2012 [statutory guidance](#) issued by the Secretary of

State for Education under [Section 507B](#) of the [Education and Inspections Act 2006](#). This relates to local authorities' duty to secure services and activities for young people aged 13 to 19, and those with learning difficulties to age 24, to improve their well-being.

The guidance states that local authorities:

‘...must take steps to ascertain the views of young people and to take them into account in making decisions about services and activities for them, in line with Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). They should establish and maintain structured arrangements for doing so. To inform continuous improvement, these arrangements should enable young people to inspect and report at least annually on the quality and accessibility of provision. As appropriate they should also be involved actively in service design, delivery and governance. Young people should receive the support they need to participate, ensuring representation of the full diversity of local young people, and those who may not otherwise have a voice.’

Consultations may take place through the representative bodies dealt with in ‘[Youth representation bodies](#)’, but other methods are also used, including online consultations, focus groups, street interviews and surveys. The use of social media has become increasingly common in consultations, as this is regarded as a particularly suitable means of engaging young people's interest.

Revised general [consultation principles](#) issued by the [Cabinet Office](#) in January 2016 for use by government departments, advised them to:

Consider whether informal iterative consultation is appropriate, using new digital tools and open, collaborative approaches. Consultation is not just about formal documents and responses. It is an on-going process.

The Cabinet Office stated its own intention to ‘use more digital methods to consult with a wider group of people at an earlier stage in the policy-forming process’.

The Department for Education issued [statutory guidance](#) on listening to and involving children and young people in 2014.

Consultations are ad hoc, rather than following a fixed schedule.

Actors

[Youth representation bodies](#), youth organisations, young advisors/experts and individual young people, may all be involved in consultations.

The main public authorities involved are government departments, government agencies and local authorities. Also playing a role are:

Children's Commissioner for England

The post of [Children's Commissioner](#) was established under the [Children Act 2004](#) which gave the Commissioner responsibility for promoting awareness of the views and interests of children. The [Children and Families Act 2014](#) strengthens the remit, powers and independence of the Commissioner and also strengthens the Commissioner's responsibilities towards children in care and other vulnerable groups.

The Commissioner is responsible for the rights of all children and young people until they are 18 years old, or 25 years old, if they have been in care, are care leavers or have a disability.

Some of the ways the Commissioner involves children and young people in its work are:

- **Research:** This is based on what children and young people say. The Commissioner and staff consult children and young people who have experience or knowledge of particular issues, both individually and in groups. Their views inform the Commissioner's decision-making and recommendations.
- **Young people advisory groups:** among the groups is Amplify, an advisory group of 30 young people aged from 11 to 18 years. Amplify has three whole group meetings a year and smaller groups meet to advise the Commissioner or to work on specific issues.
- **Young expert groups:** there are two young expert groups - one for children with care experience and one for the Commissioner's communications work.
- **Participation Network:** this is made up of organisations, services and groups that directly work with children and young people and promote Article 12 of the UNCRC. It includes schools, colleges, youth groups, children in care councils and voluntary and community organisations. The Commissioner ensures that groups that support disabled children and young people, those seeking asylum or who have been in trouble with the law, are included.
- The Children's Commissioner organises an annual '[Takeover Challenge](#)' in conjunction with children's newspaper, [First News](#), which organisations across England open their doors to children and young people to take over adult roles. Takeover puts children and young people in decision-making positions and encourages organisations and businesses to hear their views.

The All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Youth Affairs

The [All Party Parliamentary Group \(APPG\) on Youth Affairs](#) is one of a number of informal groups of Members of both Houses of Parliament with a common interest in particular issues. The APPG on Youth Affairs is coordinated by the [British Youth Council](#) and exists to: raise the profile of issues which affect and concern young people; encourage dialogue between parliamentarians, young people and youth services; and encourage a coordinated and coherent approach to policy making on youth affairs.

The group has around 70 members and meets several times throughout the year, often inviting a Minister to join it.

British Youth Council

The British Youth Council ([BYC](#)) is an independent UK charity run for and by young people which works to empower young people and promote their interests at a local, national, European and international level; and to promote the increased participation of young people in society and public life. BYC has secured government funding until 2020 to support its '[Youth Voice](#)' initiative, which includes the Youth Parliament (see '[Youth parliament](#)'). BYC is a membership organisation, bringing together approximately 230 separate organisations that work with young people locally, nationally and internationally. BYC provides a range of youth participation services to young people in England so they can influence public decision making at a local and national level. As well as the Youth parliament, these activities include:

- [Youth Select Committee](#) – annual inquiries (mirroring the organisation of House of Commons Select Committees) into issues that young people care about to influence policies.

- [Young Mayor Network](#) - a body that gives directly-elected young mayors the chance to support each other and come together.
- [Local Youth Council Network](#) - local youth councils are forums that represent the views of young people at a local level.

The [Youth Select Committee](#), is a BYC initiative, supported by the House of Commons. There are eleven committee members, aged 15 to 18, and include Members of the UK Youth Parliament, Youth Councillors, a Young Mayor, and reserved seats and representatives from each devolved nation. It forms part of the Youth Voice programme run by the BYC. It enables young people to participate on a national level – hold inquiries into issues that they care about to influence policies.

From 2019 BYC also leads in the implementation of [three commitments arising from the Civil Society Strategy](#) to encourage young people to participate in making national policy, including a Youth Steering Group, a Young Inspectors Group and Digital Youth engagement research.

Information on the extent of youth participation

There is no central source of data or statistics on the level of young people's participation in policy consultations.

Good practice in involving hard-to-reach groups includes making consultation documents available in different language versions or in children and young people's versions. An example of this is a young people's [call for evidence](#) from a consultation run in February and March 2016 on peer support and emotional well-being. Suggestions for good practice at local level are included in the Local Government Association [guide to engagement](#). They also published [A Councillor's Workbook on Engaging with Young People](#).

In January 2016, the Cabinet Office issued updated general [consultation principles](#) for use by other government departments and stated:

'We will use more digital methods to consult with a wider group of people at an earlier stage in the policy-forming process. We will make it easier for the public to contribute their views, and we will try harder to use clear language and plain English in consultation documents.'

Outcomes

In 2019, a total of [838,288 young people voted on UK topics and 840,322 young people voted on devolved topics](#) in the annual 'Make Your Mark' ballot. The ballot decides what Members of the UK Youth Parliament should debate and vote on to be their campaign for the coming year. See '[Youth parliament](#)' for further information.

The national campaigns chosen through the ballot produce national outcomes as well as local outcomes. For instance, the [Youth Select Committee](#) produces a report on the national campaign topic, which then receives a formal Government response. Protecting the environment was the number one issue voted for, with 399,652 votes.

Consultation feedback is usually in the form of a published government response to the consultation or a commissioned analysis. Feedback on how responses will contribute to policy-making may also be provided through relevant organisations involved in the consultation. In some cases, a specific version of the response is issued for children and young people, which focuses on their participation.

Large-scale initiatives for dialogue or debate between public institutions and young people

The Children's Commissioner organises an annual '[Takeover Challenge](#)' in which organisations across England open their doors to children and young people to take over adult roles. Takeover puts children and young people in decision-making positions and encourages organisations and businesses to hear their views. The latest [#TakeoverChallenge Day](#) takes place on 29 November 2019. An estimated 100,000 children and young people across England took over in 1000 organisations, as part of Takeover Challenge in 2017 and 2018.

A component of the Takeover Challenge is the '[Whitehall Takeover](#)', in which children in the care of local authorities and care leavers were handed the reins. Twenty-two Secretaries of State and Ministers in departments ranging from the Ministry of Justice and the Home Office to the Foreign Office, as well as hundreds of MPs, 14 Permanent Secretaries and the highest ranking senior servants, all took a back and put children in charge. Children and young people represented Ministers at top meetings, worked with civil servants on new policies, asked the questions that mattered to them and spoke at high profile events.

NHS (National Health Service) England has a [Youth Forum](#) which aims to provide a voice for young people. It is made up of up to 25 Young People recruited from all over the country and linked into a Facebook network of hundreds more young people. The young people work in partnership with NHS England, Public Health England and the Department of Health to improve health services for young people. The NHS Youth Forum Impact Report 2013-2017 is available [here](#). At the time of writing (September 2020), this is the most recent report available.

In 2020, the NHS Youth Forum worked on several COVID-19 responses, including [updating PHE guidance](#) on shielding to make it relevant and accessible for young people and led social media campaigns such as [#mycovid19pledge](#).