



A Guide to Establishing
Participation Groups in
Education Settings

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1. Introduction

This guidance has been created to support education settings and targeted youth services to create participation groups and space in which children and young people can use their voice to impact what is discussed and raised as a priority around the RHSE (Relationships, Health and Sexual Education) and PHSE (Physical, Health and Social Education) curriculums.

2. Background

2.1 Children and young people's voice

During the pandemic, children and young people reported they would like to see more education around diversity, life skills, and relationships¹ within the RHSE and PHSE curriculum offered in schools.

2.2 Rapid Review

In 2021, KBSP undertook a child safeguarding [rapid review](#) following the tragic death of a young person and her unborn baby. The rapid review found that there was an increase in late bookings and unexpected pregnancies during the pandemic. The review made recommendations to improve the way children and young people in Bristol receive education and information about local sexual health and pregnancy services.

2.3 Belonging Strategy

Bristol City Council's [Belonging Strategy](#) was published in October 2021. It sets out how the city will begin to recover from the pandemic.

The new strategy supports the [One City Plan](#). One of the aims of the strategy is for everyone in Bristol to have the best start in life, to be able to gain the support and skills they need to thrive and prosper in adulthood. The strategy also sets out a collective vision to ensure the voices of Bristol's children and young people are heard in the city:

- Ensure that all children and families feel that they 'belong' and have their voices heard in decisions that affect them, with a particular focus on those who are most marginalised. This involves identifying those who do not feel included and finding different ways to help them participate, proactively tackling barriers, following best practice and seeking continuous feedback from families.
- Children grow up warm, fed and listened to – their voice is important.

“Inclusion in education is about ensuring that every learner feels valued and respected, and can enjoy a clear sense of belonging”

2.4 Ofsted

In June 2021, Ofsted published their review of findings on [peer-on-peer sexual abuse and sexual harassment](#) within schools and colleges following a request from government to undertake a rapid review. One of the areas Ofsted were asked to report on was:

- How can schools and colleges be supported further to successfully deliver the new RSHE (relationships, sex and health education) curriculum, including in teaching about sexual abuse, cyber bullying and pornography as well as healthy relationships and consent?

The Executive summary of their findings state:

- Central to this should be a carefully planned and implemented RHSE curriculum, sanctions and interventions to tackle poor behaviour and provide support for children and young people who need it, training and clear expectations for staff and governors, and listening to pupil voice.

Alongside this, [Ofsted's School Inspection Handbook](#) (1st September 2021) has a list of expectations for schools to achieve Outstanding which participation groups would effectively contribute to:

- Pupils behave with consistently high levels of respect for others. They play a highly positive role in creating a school environment in which commonalities are identified and celebrated, difference is valued and nurtured, and bullying, harassment and violence are never tolerated.
- Pupils consistently have highly positive attitudes and commitment to their education. They are highly motivated and persistent in the face of difficulties. Pupils make a highly positive, tangible contribution to the life of the school and/ or the wider community. Pupils actively support the well-being of other pupils.

3. Theories and legislation

3.1 UNCRC (United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child)

The [United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child](#) came into force in September 1990. It is the most complete statement of children's rights and is the most widely ratified international human rights treaty in history.

The Convention has 54 articles. Article 13 outlines the right children have to a freedom of expression and to impart information and ideas of all kinds. It emphasises that any use of artistic medium can be used to convey this. Article 17 highlights the need for children to 'assess information and material from a diversity of sources,

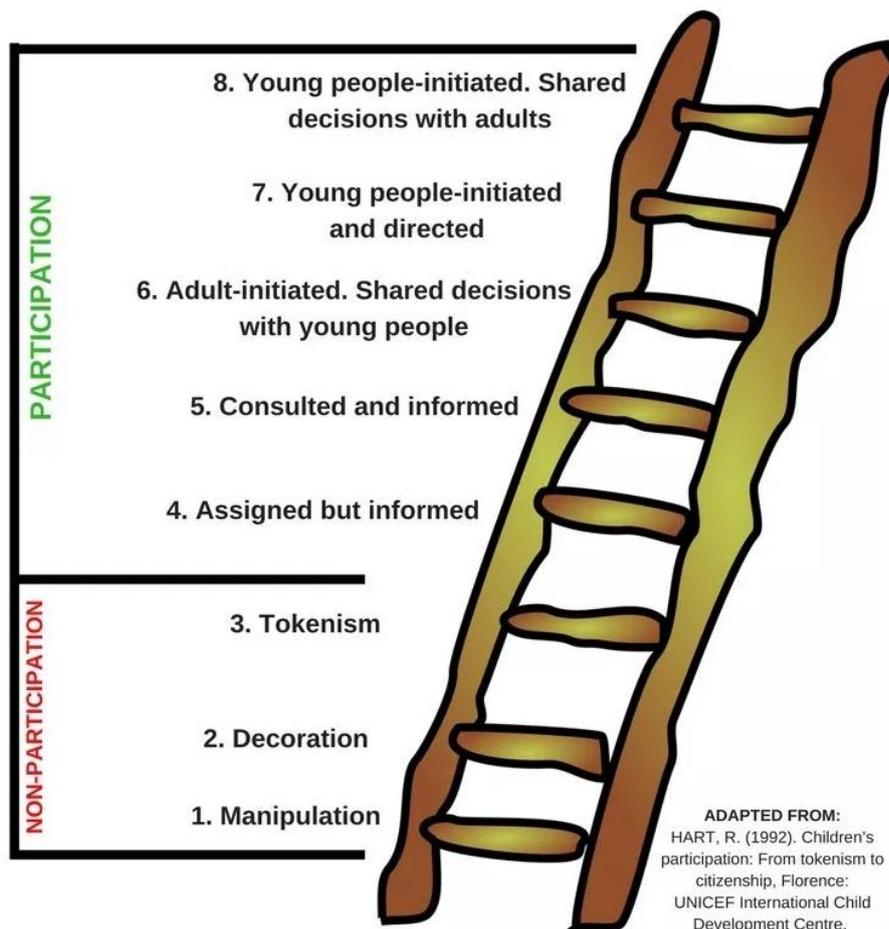
especially those aimed at the promotion of his or her social, spiritual and moral well-being and physical and mental health.'

Article 23 is in relation to children and young people with disabilities:

States Parties recognize that a mentally or physically disabled child should enjoy a full and decent life, in conditions which ensure dignity, promote self-reliance and facilitate the child's active participation in the community

3.2 Harts Ladder of Participation

Hart's Ladder of Participation is one example of how participation can vary. The purpose of this guidance is to support settings to reach the higher levels of the ladder to ensure the voices of children and young people are valued and incorporated in safeguarding.



4. Establishing Groups

4.1 Staffing

Encouraging children and young people to participate in group conversations starts off with an enthusiastic and proactive member of staff who is passionate about

listening to and implementing the voice of the child. The member of staff could be teaching or non-teaching. They will require the support of senior leadership within the setting to make impactful change and to ensure children and young people are advocated for fully.

At times conversations may touch on upsetting subjects. It is recommended there is a second facilitator of the group(s) to support with the emotional impact. They will also provide resilience to the group, continuing momentum in the absence of the main facilitator.

4.2 Members

A diverse group of children are required to ensure conversations cover a number of areas that impact children and young people's lives, particularly the lives of the most vulnerable children and young people in your setting. Some children and young people may require additional support to access the group which should be considered. Support may include, for example; an interpreter for children and young people where English is their second language, a British Sign Language interpreter, physical access support, a learning support assistant, assistive technology.

It is up to the setting as to the numbers within a participation group, but it is suggested a maximum of around 10 young people.

It is important to involve children and young people from all ages and backgrounds, including those with protected and hidden characteristics.

4.3 Group Agreements

Group Agreements should be set up when the group is established. These should be created as part of a discussion with the whole group and should cover issues for example; confidentiality, expectations, rules around reporting concerns, inclusive language (e.g. pronouns, correct pronunciation and spellings of names), and an open sharing culture for participants.

Terms of Reference² can also be useful as they explain how often the group will meet, who is responsible for the group, and how things will be taken forward or actioned.

4.4 Consent

Gillick Competency³ should be used when recruiting to a participation group. All conversations should be appropriate enough to be discussed within the RHSE and PHSE sessions. It should also be a space for learning and age-appropriate language.

4.5 Compensation

Children and young people should be compensated for their time. To ensure ongoing engagement and the voice of the most vulnerable young people are heard, their time needs to be valued. This could come in the form of gift cards or a points system that works towards a gift card. Perhaps it could be in the form of a hot meal at the end of each meeting. It is acknowledged that to ensure a variety of voices are heard consistently, time needs to be compensated for.

4.6 Setting priorities

It is important that children and young people feel heard and see that their input has been taken seriously. Some ways in which children and young people can be involved in sharing their ideas could be through presentations to other pupils, or through a buddying system where they can support other pupils who may need some guidance and advice.

Obtaining the voice of children and young people can be a creative process. They may wish to express their voice through a number of mediums, for example, story-telling, poetry, art work, music, or drama.

An action plan should be written with the group so they know what they will be working on, providing the children and young people with timescales and managing their expectations. The children and young people need to be the ones to set their priorities and what they would like to focus on throughout the academic year.

Possible themes to consider could be:

- The Environment
- Sexual Health
- Healthy Relationships and the signs of domestic violence
- Sexual Harassment
- Personal Finances
- Diversity awareness e.g. Race, Trans rights
- Period Poverty
- Mental Health
- Understanding Autism Spectrum Disorder
- Gender fluidity/ identity
- Healthy lifestyles
- Violence Against Women and Girls

4.7 Sub-groups

Subgroups may be helpful when working on specific projects.

Please be aware that feedback from children and young people with protected characteristics has shown that they do not always find it beneficial to be in a segregated group as this 'others' them, so it would be dependent on whether this is appropriate for the children and young people in your setting.

4.8 Anonymous voices

Some children and young people may not feel comfortable and may not feel it is safe to share their views openly. Suggestions such as comments boxes, Park It boards, or QR codes that can be scanned to direct students to digital forms to complete, could also be used as a way to obtain voices of children and young people.

5. Appendix

¹ The Shadow Board report following the Are you OK? campaign workshop can be found [here](#)

² Terms of Reference: a description and agreement on what must be dealt with and considered when something must be done

³ Gillick Competency and Fraser guidelines help people who work with children to balance the need to listen to children's wishes with the responsibility to keep them safe:

[Gillick competence and Fraser guidelines | NSPCC Learning](#)

[Consent to treatment - Children and young people - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](#)