



Children and Young People's Voice, Influence and Engagement Practice Notes

April 2025



About this resource

What is the purpose of this document?

These practice notes are short, easy to read summaries of key findings and actionable insights about children and young people's voice, influence and engagement with supporting examples and data. These practice notes include wider insights and reflections from the Change Programme as well as the wider evidence base from the What Works in SEND Programme.

This product has been created by the REACH consortium in partnership with the Department for Education. This product contains emerging insights and learning from the Change Programme and should not be regarded as official government policy or guidance. You can read more about the Change Programme [here](#).

What does this document include?

This series of practice notes include:

-  A summary of existing engagement work across the Change Programme
-  What can meaningful engagement look like? The Lundy Model
-  What can meaningful engagement look like? Treseder's Degrees of Participation
-  Building engagement strategically from the top down
-  Key challenges local areas identified regarding engaging with children and young people
-  Practice note: Solutions for engaging children and young people
-  What do we know? strategic participation demonstrates the power of children and young people's voice and provides positive experiences that builds confidence, skills and experiences for adulthood
-  What do we know? Adopting a strong co-production and inclusive practice model is key to defining and shaping co-production in local SEND systems
-  What do we know? Learning from existing co-production models and practices for SEND service improvement for children and young people
-  Next steps - developing engagement with children and young people within the Change Programme
-  The Council for Disabled Children Participation Map
-  Council for Disabled Children resources for professionals and practitioners

Existing engagement work happening across the Change Programme

Degrees of existing practice and processes for engagement with disabled children and young people and those with SEN varied across the Change Programme Partnership areas:

- Most local areas had groups and networks of disabled children and young people and those with SEN - some well-established, some at an early stage.
- Past engagement activities included responding to surveys and consulting on strategies.
- Existing roles include representatives for SEND in a youth parliament and Young People's Champions.
- Relationships sometimes existed beyond the local area, for example through a regional SEND youth alliance.

Types of engagement with children and young people has also varied considerably across the programme:

- Some Change Programme Partnerships (CPPs) have shared information about the Change Programme with children and young people, through posters and Local Offer webpage.
- Some CPPs have consulted with children and young people and sought their feedback via surveys/questionnaires, for example to determine perceived importance of reform areas, the focus of case studies, how they would like to engage with the CPP in future.
- Some CPPs have sought input through events and sessions, for example on EHCP standardisation and templates (i.e. a focus group, and a young researchers' session); a visioning session; a cross-CPP in-person event.
- In at least one CPP, children and young people have been included in the CPP steering group and plans are in place to start a formal advisory group for the programme.
- At least one local SEND partnership has a permanent young person as a member.
- One local area is actively promoting representation of often isolated sub-populations within its children and young people community in the Change Programme.
- Where there has been little or no engagement, this has generally been due to a lack of capacity and accessible resources.

What can meaningful engagement look like?

The Lundy Model of Participation

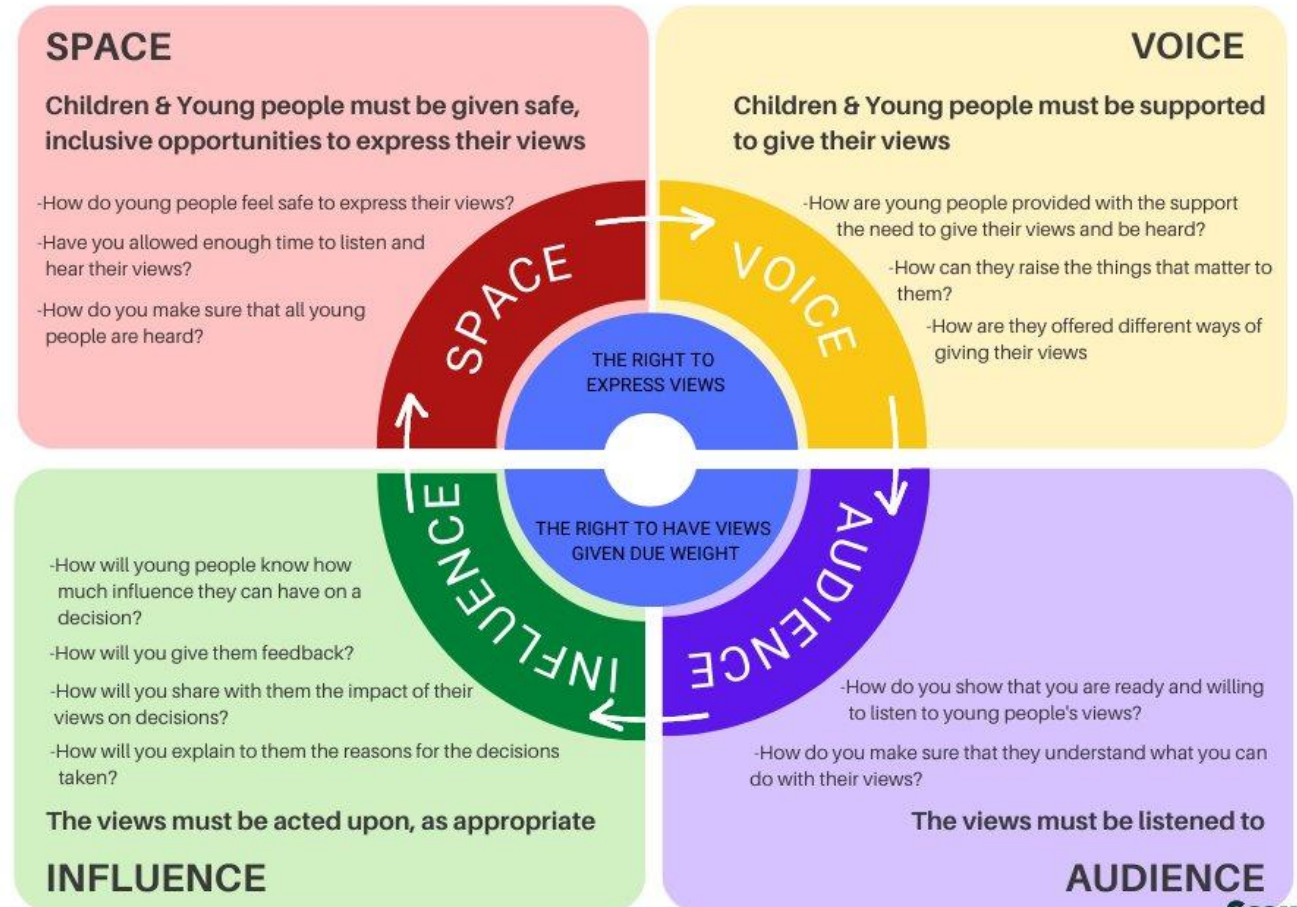
The Lundy Model of Participation provides a way of conceptualising a child's right to participation, as laid down in Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. It is intended to focus decision-makers on the distinct, albeit interrelated, elements of the provision. The four elements have a rational chronological order: space, voice, audience, influence.

We often refer to participation as 'children and young people's voice', but voice is not enough on its own. If we do not give children and young people access to the right spaces, audiences, and show them how they can influence decision-making then we are only allowing children and young people to speak into a void.

The Lundy model shows us that all 4 elements need to be present to give young people an opportunity to affect decision-making. The same also applies when we are thinking about co-production - all 4 of these elements need to be included.

The Lundy Model

Enabling meaningful participation of
Children & Young people



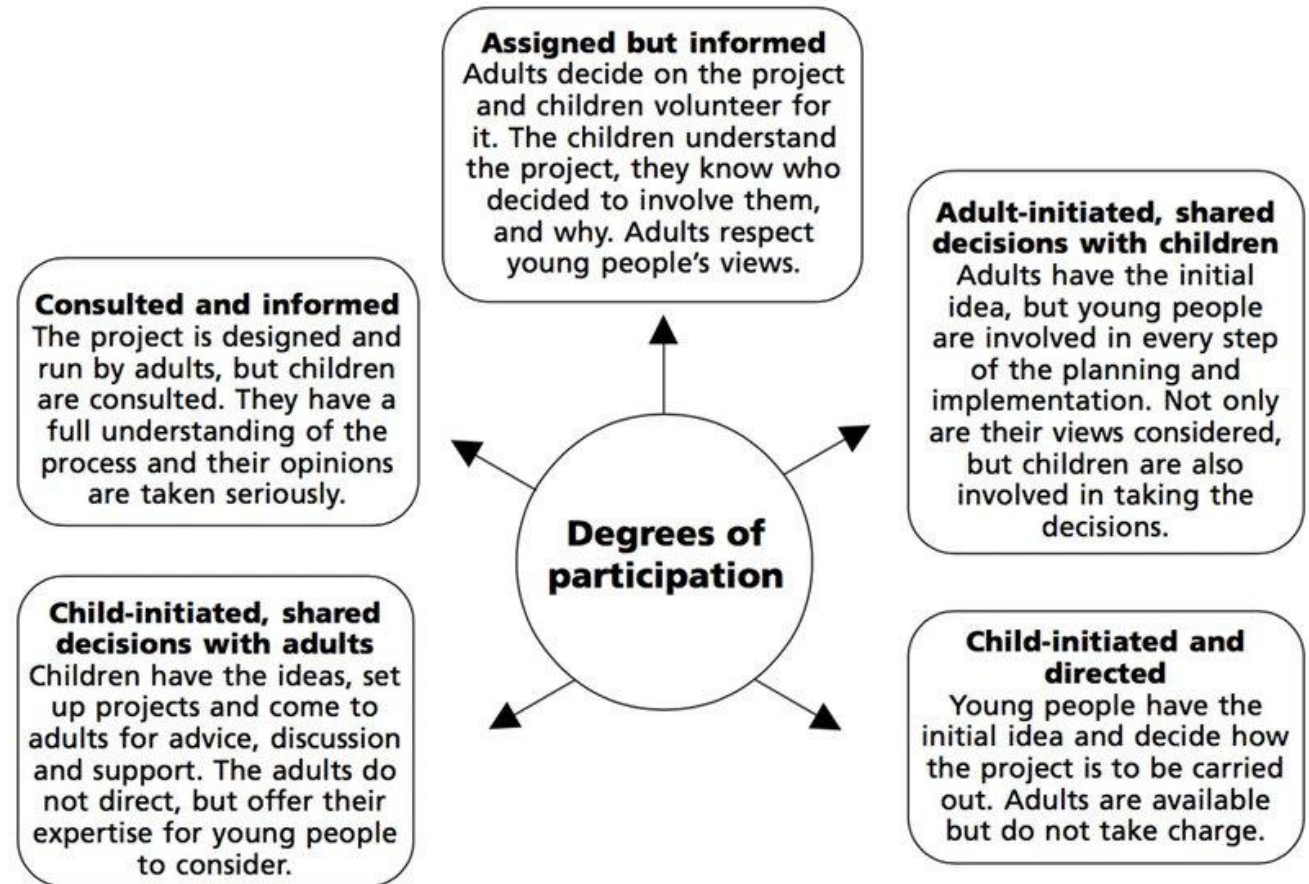
What can meaningful engagement look like?

Treseder's Degrees of Participation



Developed by Phil Treseder in 1997, Treseder's (1997; Treseder & Crowley, 2001) Degrees of Participation model re-constructed Hart's five levels of participation, shifting them out of a ladder, and into a non-hierarchical frame. Treseder and Crowley (2001) stated that a circular model moved away from the assumption that there is an ideal level of youth participation, as represented by Hart's (1992) highest rung. Instead, they argued that young people should have choice regarding their participation, and the appropriate degree of youth participation should be tailored to the needs of participants, rather than aspiring to any specific ideal.

In making this argument, they cite United Kingdom government reports that highlighted the importance of youth's own choice, priorities, and needs regarding their participation. Following Treseder's model, the best level of participation is whichever fits the needs of those involved.



Building engagement strategically from the top down: reflections from REACH subject matter experts in participation

Both the Lundy Model of Participation and Treseder's Degrees of Participation are extremely useful theory models that support our understanding of how to deliver effective strategic engagement. Each focuses on slightly different aspects of participation to build effective strategic engagement:

- The Lundy Model highlights the values we hold in our commitment to strategic engagement and is centred on a Rights-based perspective.
- The Degrees of Participation demonstrates how engagement approaches are distinct, and close consideration of the most appropriate approach needs to be considered for engagement to be most effective and meaningful for children and young people.

However, neither is a map for how to effectively build and deliver effective strategic engagement. That work comes from within organisations and services themselves.

For children and young people's voices and experiences to meaningfully and effectively influence strategic decision-making and service design we need to ensure we are thinking about it, planning it, and identifying how to use what we are told from the outset.

We want to think about when and how to bring children and young people into the conversation before we start the strategic planning or service design - for young people to be able to influence as much as they are able to, voice and influencing engagement needs to be at the forefront of our minds from day one. Some examples of how to do this include:

- Ensuring there is accountability and responsibility for voice and influence at the very top of an organisation and programme.
- Voice and influence should be clearly embedded throughout strategic documents, this includes clearly stating when engagement will take place, how it will be delivered, how what is being shared will be incorporated, how will organisations continue to build on what they hear.
- Build an engagement strategy that turns strategic commitments into action.
- Work with children and young people to understand their key priorities (they can't do everything!) and understand how these may change over time.
- Do not expect children and young people to have all the answers. They are collaborating with you - it is not realistic to expect them to solve all problems.
- Identify where children and young people may be willing to be part of influencing opportunities:
 - Going to where children and young people already meet is often the best approach.
 - Use online spaces already known and familiar to children and young people.



Building engagement strategically from the top down: Key challenges local areas identified regarding engaging with children and young people



Evidencing that children and young people's voice is heard

Some local authorities find it challenging to demonstrate the impact of children and young people's participation to them. Demonstrating that their views have been considered and acted upon is a key barrier to effective engagement work - often placing them in a difficult position. Children and young people can feel frustrated with this process, often leading to feeling as though their voice had no impact or power to influence - consequently leading to feelings of mistrust, a lack of motivation and unwillingness to re-engage with future opportunities.



Widening representation of children and young people

Some local authorities reported finding it difficult to engage a diverse range of voices, representative of the local area, in participation opportunities - noting it is often the same pool of children and young people taking up the offer. Similarly, there is often low take up of engagement requests. Some local authorities reported limited opportunities for children and young people who do not attend school to share their views in the context of their education.



Empowering children and young people to see the power of their voice

Some local authorities highlighted confidence as a barrier to becoming involved in participation work and similarly when engagement takes place, particularly for some cohorts of children and young people where parents and carers have historically advocated on their behalf. This coupled with cohorts often not being exposed to many opportunities to have their voice heard results in limited awareness and expectations amongst children and young people on the power and impact of their voice. Local authorities also noted that it is difficult to engage children and young people with policy development as often, this area is not of interest to them.

Practice note: solutions for engaging children and young people



Create a meaningful feedback loop

Local Authorities highlighted demonstrating the impact of participation as critical for meaningful engagement. Key to this is developing a feedback loop to facilitate understanding that views are acted upon to inform decisions. Professionals and practitioners - both within local authorities and education settings can actively acknowledge the views of children and young people by developing 'you said, we did' resources, this must be conducted in a timely manner to share with children and young people and is especially important to maintain motivation and willingness to continue to engage.

Local authorities can develop feedback loop protocols to guide all engagement work to provide consistent feedback to children and young people. This should include: an overview of the asks to participants within the engagement session, how feedback will be used, whether updates will be provided and the scope for impact. Post-session, the relevant team or organisation should complete a feedback form which considers: how information is being used to inform decisions; whether the groups views or ideas will be included in any submissions, guides or business cases that may be completed; whether the feedback resulted in considering different approaches or enhanced thinking of a particular subject. Local authorities can develop an accessible document based on the above to share with the children and young people involved to talk through it and provide the opportunity for questions. This can be a standing agenda item at a regular group or a follow up session with the group involved.



Widening representation and improving take up

Local Authorities highlighted engaging a diverse range of voices, representative of the local area as key to effective participation. Local authorities can widen representation and improve take up through utilising mixed approaches to suit the local context for example, attending youth clubs and education settings. It is also important to consider timing of engagement requests as there are often pressure points for parents such as transition between phases of education and returning to education following half-term which can affect take-up.

West Sussex's Youth Participation and Engagement Officer works closely with colleges to organise sessions within settings, this facilitates wider engagement as pupil cohorts consist of diverse characteristics. This has yielded greater engagement compared to hosting events outside of settings and also reduces the ask on young people.

Gloucestershire set up an online Community of Practice (CoP) for professionals and practitioners working with children and young people. Members include representatives from Social Care, Health, Youth Violence, Youth Justice, the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) and existing participation groups. The purpose of the CoP is to network, share best practice, share existing evidence and collaborate on engagement opportunities. The CoP increases reach by connecting members with the CoPs existing engagement opportunities and maximises engagement as members can share further opportunities on topics children and young people are currently engaged with and interested in.



Building confidence and empowering young people

Local authorities can support children and young people to develop skills and increase confidence to participate. Key to this is creating a safe space where groups feel comfortable to contribute. Local authorities should utilise existing environments to ensure children and young people feel safe. **Shropshire** work closely with Youth Workers to support children and young people who are not in education to share their views - this support from trusted adults reassures children and young people that it is a safe space to open up. Celebrating and validating contributions no matter how small is key, as this demonstrates to children and young people that their views are valued and facilitates further engagement. Providing young people with opportunities to observe peers in leadership positions facilitates confidence building and can demonstrate the value and power of youth voice, for example arranging school sessions led by participation groups and opportunities to visit local Youth Councils. Children and young people may not always see the value of engaging with policy development - motivating young people through 'engagement hooks' can facilitate this. For example, supporting young people to identify what they do and do not enjoy about school and why, thinking about the specific components that make them feel included. In **Manchester** the fora for engagement activities is key to this, Manchester organise activities children and young people have said they would like to participate in to capture youth voice, for example gaming workshops. Manchester noted the commission to the provider as being integral to successfully capture views.

What do we know? Strategic participation demonstrates the power of children and young people's voice and provides positive experiences that builds confidence, skills and experiences for adulthood

Findings from the Change Programme build on existing evidence in relation to children and young people's voice as set out in the What Works in SEND effective practice evidence framework. There is specific learning in relation to the impact of participation and whole-school inclusive practice.

Lincolnshire Young Voices (LYV) is a strategic participation group. Its aims in the context of developing co-production in the local area were to:

- Establish a strategic young people's group that could influence and improve support for disabled young people and those with SEN in Lincolnshire;
- Drive improvements in services for disabled young people and those with SEN, encapsulated in the group's mantra, 'together, our voices make a difference'; and
- Provide young people who were members of LYV with valuable experiences and skills such as social opportunities, confidence, self-esteem, and employability.

Each year, LYV members agree a set of priorities on which they will focus, which they "pitch", alongside their report of the previous year's activities, to senior Council and Integrated Care Board (ICB) members. LYV is now into the fourth cycle of pitching its priorities and securing the backing of the Council and the ICB. LYV have been able to influence improvements in the way key services for disabled young people and those with SEN are delivered, as well as how broader community services make themselves accessible to all young people, including those with SEND. The first two co-chairs of LYV have both secured paid employment in fields relating to research and advocacy for young people and, in their feedback to the Council and ICB, both gave credit to LYV for providing them with invaluable experience.

The What Works in SEND Effective Practice Evidence Framework considers that both the "strength of evidence" and 'breadth of impact' of this case study is **good**.

See full case study [here](#)

The **Essex Multi Schools Council (MSC)** works with 500 schools and colleges and runs a successful programme for Ambassadors, who lead on projects, give speeches and inform strategic developments. Their aims were to:

- Foster a positive understanding of the diversity of young people's needs and address negative perceptions;
- Strengthen inclusion in schools and, in so doing, contribute to a more inclusive society; and
- Give young people a voice to talk about and act on the key issues that matter to them

A case study collected by the MSC demonstrates the impact on whole-school inclusive practice: the school have included 45 pupils in MSC meetings, all staff and year groups have had SEND awareness sessions, and the school was awarded an MSC bronze-level award. Members of the MSC have been involved in shaping key initiatives within the local SEND system, including the school attendance strategy and the Essex offer of Ordinarily Available Provision. A professional in Essex County Council described the significant shift that had taken place within the local system because of the influence of the MSC *"We have seen a huge shift internally. The Multi Schools Council has meant that strategic leaders now ask, 'What would children want? What would they think?'"*

The What Works in SEND Effective Practice Evidence Framework considers that both the "strength of evidence" and 'breadth of impact' of this case study is **promising**.

See full case study [here](#)

What do we know? Adopting a strong co-production and inclusive practice model is key to defining and shaping co-production in local SEND systems

Findings from the Change Programme build on existing evidence in relation to children and young people's voice as set out in the What Works in SEND effective practice evidence framework. There is specific learning in relation to high-quality co-production and inclusive practice.

Genuine Partnerships is a community interest company made up of young people, parent carers and practitioners working together to model and promote high-quality co-production and inclusive practice. Their aims were to:

- Create a clear framework to define and shape co-production, setting out how it can be made tangible and systemic;
- Draw on families' lived experiences, empowering young people and parent carers to use their voice to shape strategic initiatives and inform day-to-day practice; and
- Strengthen inclusive practice and improve day-to-day lived experiences for families, using partnership working and co-production.

Guiding Voices is the forum through which Genuine Partnerships works with young people to shape decision-making in the local SEND system - discussing priorities, agreeing actions and contributing to the development of key strategies. Guiding Voices helps to articulate and promote the views of other groups of young people locally, and works with the Genuine Partnerships team to deliver Four Cornerstones training to settings. In 2023/24 Genuine Partnerships oversaw 51 development projects with schools, settings or services. 24 schools and settings have achieved or are actively seeking Charter Gold accreditation – awarded when a setting or service demonstrates that the Four Cornerstones are being genuinely embedded within their culture and ethos, and that this is being achieved in partnership with parent carers and young people. Feedback from school leaders working with Genuine Partnerships towards their Charter Gold accreditation suggests the process leads to concrete impact on culture and practice in relation to inclusion and co-production.

The What Works in SEND Effective Practice Evidence Framework considers that the “strength of evidence” of this case study is **good**. The “breadth of impact” of this case study is **promising**.

See full case study [here](#)



“There has been greater clarity of thought around our SEND provision and we have considered things from a parent’s perspective more thoroughly.”

– School senior leader

What do we know? Learning from existing co-production models and practices for SEND service improvement for children and young people

Findings from the Change Programme build on existing evidence in relation to co-production models and practices in UK local authorities and local government as set out by the What Works in SEND programme. Four themes describe what we can learn from these processes and models about effective co-production.

Theme 1. Changing culture and attitudes towards co-production

- Lesson 1: It is important to define what is meant by co-production for all the people involved prior to beginning any co-produced activity. People involved in co-production need to be able to appreciate the spectrum of approaches to co-production and how these may differ from alternative involvement approaches, such as consultation, or surveying service users.
 - We found that Involve's definition of co-production (copied below) is simple and useful, and one we would recommend to others undertaking a process of co-production; *"Where service providers and users work together to reach a collective outcome. The approach is value-driven and built on the principle that those who are affected by a service are best placed to help design it"* (Involve, 2024).
- Lesson 2: Encourage co-production to be valued as an important and beneficial activity for the organisation. We recognise that this process of acceptance will not be automatic, or simple to achieve. Whilst a general understanding, awareness and advocacy of co-production might develop as organisational culture evolves, initially, co-production approaches might need to be written into specific policies or practice guidelines.
 - A recommendation to undertake co-production could be supported with monitoring and reporting of varied outcomes which are co-produced with users, for example, how do we know the co-production is meaningful?
 - When people were not clear how or why they were involved in coproduction, they did not understand the relevance of it and adopted more traditional methods of involvement. Mandated co-production may help to encourage a wider organisational agenda which embeds co-production into service delivery and design.

Theme 2. Flexibility and innovation in the approach to co-production

- Lesson 3: There is no standard approach to achieve effective co-production. In the initial stages of planning and conduct of co-production in SEND it would be useful to adopt a trial-and-error approach of different techniques and mechanisms. For example, different methods of inviting participation, varied forms of communication during co-production.
- Lesson 4: It could be helpful to acquire models and processes of SEND co-production from other organisations who appear to have achieved meaningful co-production. However, exact replication might be impossible to achieve, and inappropriate to assume. Allowing for flexibility to pick and mix co-production techniques may be more successful because it will be developed for each unique setting and population.

What do we know? Learning from existing co-production models and practices for SEND service improvement for children and young people (continued)

Theme 3. Importance of ‘place based’ (physical setting) co-production in Local Authority (LA) setting

- Lesson 5: Try to avoid co-production processes in places that are not familiar to invited communities. Whilst it might be logistically easier to invite people to LA meeting rooms or spaces, the quality of involvement and co-production could be improved if activities take place in community settings.
 - Choosing the location of co-production could be an initial task for members who take part. For example, local leaders can be alert to the opportunities for advancing the power of their place in supporting co-production plans.

Theme 4. Community empowerment and valuing a range of voices

- Lesson 6: Try and delay involving those people who are routinely involved in improvement and participation. Whilst recognising that this is a difficult approach to take in resource-constrained settings, it will help to encourage a range of voices in coproduction and that the co-production community reflect the wider population of users.
- Lesson 7: Active support needs to be provided to allow people to be involved in coproduction and for their voices to be heard. Successful approaches might include lay chairs, designated community advocates (who undertake recruitment or information sharing), or transportation and interpretation services.
 - The evidence suggests that the co-production sponsor needs to have the necessary personal commitment and authority to implement outcomes from co-production and the resources (financial or otherwise) to ensure a range of voices are heard.

See full report including the five models and processes of co-production used in the UK’s local authorities and local government [here](#).



Developing engagement with children and young people within the Change Programme

Local authorities have identified the following steps in developing engagement with disabled children and young people and those with special educational needs in phase 2 of the Change Programme.



Hold engagement events, including focus groups on Alternative Provision and transitions



Creating videos by and for children and young people about the Change Programme and sharing updates via the Local Offer and other channels.



Prioritising and planning future engagement for example around inclusion and commissioning young people to undertake engagement work.



Planned Recruitment for key roles such as Participation Officer's.



Supporting young people to identify areas of work that are important to them, allowing for discussions to be youth led.



Strategic-level young people's lived experience experts to be involved in the Change Programme.



Plans to widen the representation of children and young people's voices. For example, those who have been permanently excluded.



Build relationships and directly engage with education settings to undertake engagement work within settings.

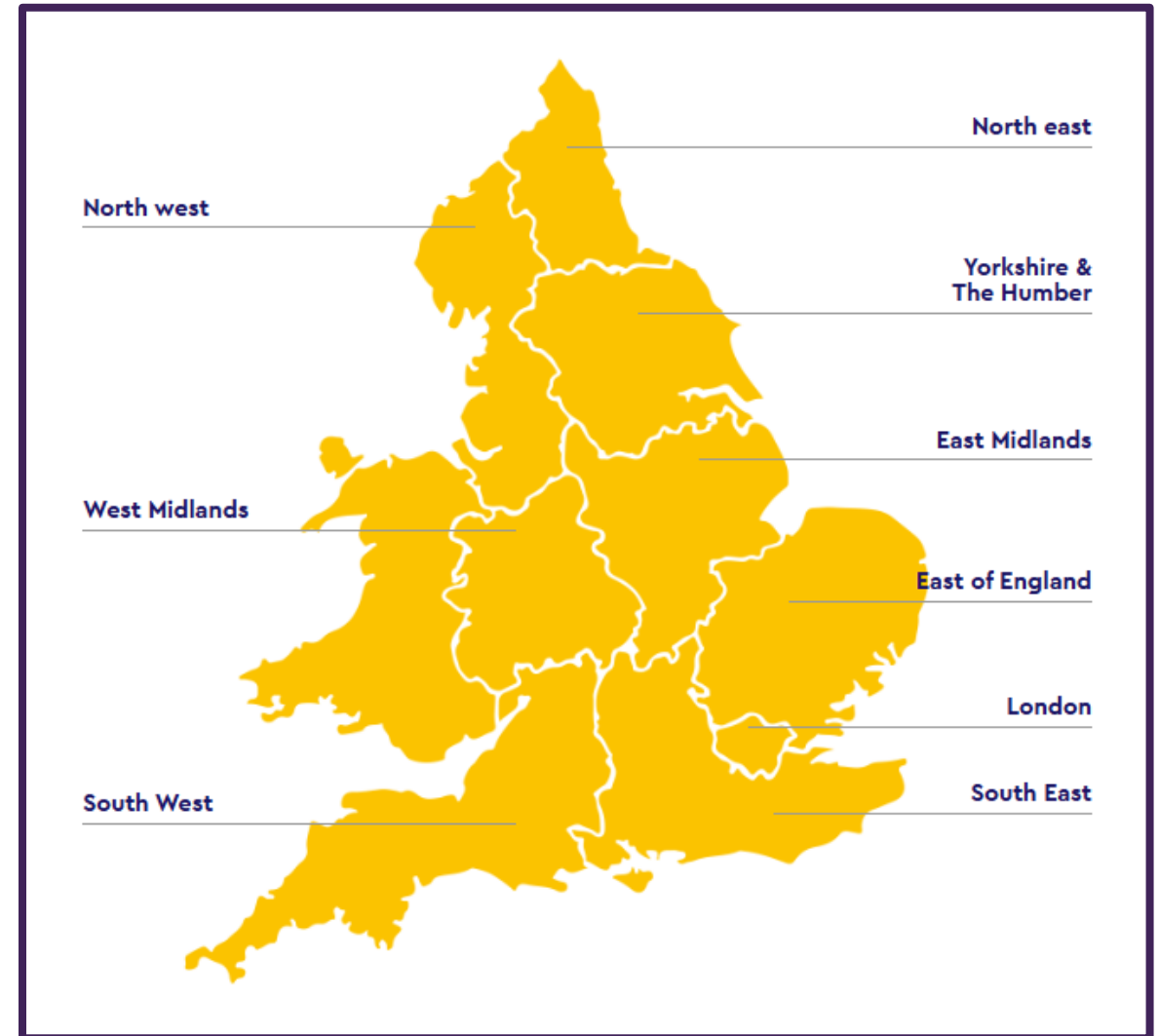
The Council for Disabled Children Participation Map



Find your local participation group for children and young people.

- The CDC interactive map connects you with strategic participation groups for disabled children and young people and children and young people with special educational needs in England.
- From this map, you should be able to find the contact details of any strategic participation group running in your local area.
- If you are aware of any participation groups that are not on this map, please contact participation@ncb.org.uk

View [here](#).



The Council for Disabled Children Participation Map

The Council for Disabled Children – Subject Matter Experts in participation, offer opportunities for professionals and practitioners who are designing and delivering participation and co-production at a strategic level across children and young people’s health, education, and social care, as well as a range of resources. Community of Practice events and shared support coffee mornings are advertised via the Making Ourselves Heard newsletter and forum. You can find more information below.

For any questions, please email: participation@ncb.org.uk.



Quarterly Making Participation Work Practitioners’ Community of Practice events: past themes include evidencing and evaluating participation and creative methods of participation and engagement i.e. arts, theatre, and music-based.



Monthly shared support coffee mornings: a chance to connect, learn and share expertise.



Making Ourselves Heard forum: an online e-forum for professionals and practitioners. Join the forum [here](#).



Participation and co-production resources [here](#).



The Making Ourselves Heard monthly participation newsletter. Sign up [here](#).