

HOW TO CREATE A YOUNG ADVISORY GROUP

**A guide by
Young Advisors to
Natural England**

Co-produced by the Young
Advisory Group and the University
of East London and University of
Central Lancashire.

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INTRODUCTION

This short guide offers an introduction to setting up advisory groups to involve children and young people in the work of Natural England. It provides some useful tips on what to consider before involving children and young people to contribute youth-centric ideas and insights to decision-makers through a project, event, or task. This guide can help you to plan, develop and deliver inclusive engagement using participatory approaches and techniques.

The guidance detailed in this guide has been co-produced in workshops with children and young people who formed the **Children's People and Nature Survey (C-PANS)** Young Advisory Group. We have combined the Young Advisors' ideas to create this guide, with some direct quotes presented in speech bubbles. The Young Advisory Group were aged from 8-15 and therefore included both 'children' of primary school age and 'young people' of secondary school age.

Background

In January 2023, Natural England commissioned the **University of Central Lancashire** with the **University of East**

London to form a group of Young Advisors. The group was tasked with scrutinising and providing feedback on four different aspects of the survey. These aspects included the accessibility and readability of the survey, the appropriateness of a selection of questions, the analysis of answers to open questions, and the infographics used to present the results of the survey. This innovative approach to involving children and young people in the development of surveys demonstrates a commitment to listening to the voices of the next generation and ensuring that their opinions are heard and valued.

Setting up a Young Advisory Group can be a great way to engage young individuals in decision-making processes, and to gather their insights. With the introduction of the Children Act and the signing of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, it has become increasingly important to involve children and young people in decision-making on issues that matter most to them. Each Young Advisor brings their unique perspective and ideas to the table, contributing to refining tools, and making them more accessible and inclusive for others.



“Co-producing a research project is an approach in which researchers, practitioners and the public work together, sharing power and responsibility from the start to the end of the project, including the generation of knowledge.”

(See INVOLVE. 2013. Guidance on co-producing research project)

KEY BENEFITS

Involving children and young people in environmental decisions can also have numerous benefits, not only for the well-being of these individuals, but also for the health of our planet and the future. Some key benefits include:

1. Fresh Perspectives

Children and young people often have innovative and fresh perspectives that can lead to creative solutions and new ways of thinking about environmental challenges.



2. Education and Awareness

Involvement in environmental decisions exposes children and young people to real-world issues, fostering environmental literacy, and encouraging a sense of responsibility for the planet's well-being.



3. Empowerment

By participating in decision-making processes, children and young people gain a sense of empowerment, knowing that their voices are being heard and that they can contribute to shaping their own future.



4. Ownership and Accountability

When children and young people are involved in decisions, they develop a sense of ownership over their environment, and become more accountable for its conservation.



5. Learning by Doing

Engaging in practical projects and decisions related to the environment provides hands-on learning experiences that enhance critical thinking, problem-solving, and teamwork skills.



6. Long-Term Impact

Early involvement in environmental decisions can lead to lifelong environmentally conscious behaviour, promoting sustainable lifestyles and practices.



7. Social and Emotional Development

Participation in community initiatives and decision-making can contribute to the development of important social skills, empathy, and a sense of community.



8. Intergenerational Dialogue

Involving children and young people bridges generational gaps, allowing for a valuable exchange of knowledge and experiences between different age groups.



KEY BENEFITS

9. Policy Development

Including children and young people's perspectives in policy development ensures that decisions reflect the interests and concerns of the future generations who will be most affected.



10. Advocacy and Activism

Participation in environmental decisions can inspire children and young people to become advocates for environmental issues, driving positive change in their communities and beyond.



11. Civic Engagement

Involvement in environmental decisions fosters a sense of civic duty and active citizenship, encouraging children and young people to engage with broader societal issues.



12. Innovation and Technology

Children and young people often have a strong affinity for technology and can leverage digital platforms to develop innovative solutions and engage in environmental campaigns.



13. Cultural and Social Diversity

Involving children and young people from diverse backgrounds ensures that environmental decisions are inclusive and consider a wide range of cultural and social perspectives.



14. Positive Public Image

Organisations and governments that involve children and young people in environmental decisions demonstrate a commitment to intergenerational equity and sustainable development, enhancing their public image.



In summary, the involvement of children and young people in environmental decision making has the potential to create a positive ripple effect that extends far beyond the immediate context, fostering a culture of environmental stewardship and sustainability.

RECRUIT

How best to recruit Young Advisors

First steps

- Advertise the opportunity to join the advisory group through schools, colleges, social media, flyers, posters and local youth networks.
- Create a PowerPoint presentation for teachers to share with their pupils.
- Offer rewards for getting involved
- Implement a fair and transparent selection process, possibly including application forms and interviews.

Identify Target Participants

- Make sure you target your recruitment to ensure you reach children and young people who are the best fit for the aims of the project.
- Determine the age range and the specific demographic characteristics of the children and young people you want to involve in the group.
- Share information about the opportunity with parents and guardians, so that they can tell their children.
- Get children and young people speaking about the opportunity; peer promotion works well.



Have messages spread across social media and other websites



Work with schools to share the opportunity with children.

STRUCTURE

How Young Advisors would like to come together as an advisory group

Define the Purpose and Goals

- Clearly define the purpose of the advisory group. Identify what issues it will address and how the input of Young Advisors will be used in decision-making.
- Set specific goals for the advisory group, outlining what you hope to achieve during their participation.
- Decide on the size of the group, ensuring it is manageable, while representing diverse perspectives.

Involve Children and Young People in the Planning

- Invite interested children and young people to participate in the planning process to ensure that their voices are heard from the beginning.
- Discuss the group's purpose, goals, and structure with children and young people, and incorporate their input into the final plans for individual meetings and overall projects.

Create a Plan and Structure

- Develop a plan for how the advisory group will operate, including meeting frequency, duration, and logistics (in-person or virtual).
- Decide on the mode of the meetings. For example, hybrid meetings reduce travelling costs, but can be accompanied with technological problems and can inhibit engagement and interaction.
- Make sure you agree with children and young people the most suitable times for meetings. For example deciding together whether meetings would work best during school time, evenings, weekends or during the holidays to fit in with their other commitments.
- Running meetings at school means working with teachers. Meetings during the school day may work well for primary school children, or for young people with busy home lives.



I think face-to-face conversations are better, as we can have a better focus and understanding of what points are made.



Children will probably be more comfortable at school, rather than meeting in a random location.

REWARD

How Young Advisors would like to be rewarded/remunerated for their involvement in an advisory group

Recognise and Appreciate Contributions

- Recognise the contributions and efforts of Young Advisors regularly.
- Consider offering certificates, appreciation events, or other forms of acknowledgement.
- Other forms of acknowledgement can include gift cards, vouchers, cash, toys and prizes for Young Advisors or even a day trip.

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I don't spend things that much, so I would just like toys.

“

I think notes (£5/£10) can be better, because they have no expiry date [as vouchers do]. For younger kids, vouchers could be better, because then they know what they can spend it on.

“

It's good to be rewarded, but at the end, not at the beginning. And it's best if you don't tell them at the beginning, in case that's the only reason they do it.

“

For the reward, I think that is kind of necessary because it would entice them, and would bring the children back later to return and do it again.

SUPPORT

How Young Advisors would like to be supported to retain their involvement in an advisory group

Set Up the Advisory Group

- Introduce the selected participants to the advisory group's objectives, responsibilities, and expectations.
- Assign roles and responsibilities within the group, such as a chairperson, secretary, or other necessary positions.
- Provide interactive activities to keep everyone engaged and interacting. Make sure meetings are fun.

Plan Meetings in advance

- Organise the first meeting, where you can introduce the advisory group members, share the group's objectives, and establish rapport.
- Set an agenda, and have a clear outline of what you want to achieve during meetings.

- Hold regular meetings as per the agreed schedule to maintain momentum and engagement.
- Provide advance notice of meetings.

The Importance of Having a Support System

- Create sub-groups of similar ages for easy communication.
- Encourage peer support by inviting siblings or friends to join the group.
- Help Young Advisors to record their thoughts and ideas (e.g., give them stationery).
- Use the meetings to discuss relevant topics, gather feedback, and work towards achieving the group's goals.
- You are not alone. Adult support should also come from teachers or parents who also need to understand the roles of the Young Advisors.



Knowing that there is always someone I can ask questions to when unsure about something.



Support from teachers/parents to help the child to become more confident.

ACTIVITIES

What type of activities Young Advisors like to do

Building Retention in the Group and Minimising Drop-out

- Encourage Young Advisors to share their ideas and to learn about nature and the environment.
- Provide opportunities to create animations, posters, and written materials to share with local or national communities.
- Provide opportunities for the group to generate and refine research ideas.
- Provide opportunities for the group to meet with other young environmentalists.
- Periodically introduce outdoor learning opportunities.

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Learning about nature and how to help the environment.

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Learning new things and having fun.



AVOID PROBLEMS

How to avoid things going wrong with running a youth advisory group

Establish Guidelines and Rules

- Collaborate with the advisory group to develop a set of guidelines or ground rules for respectful and constructive communication during meetings.
- Address confidentiality, attendance, specific children's needs, and other important aspects to ensure a positive and productive atmosphere.

Foster Ongoing Communication

- Encourage ongoing communication between meetings, such as through online platforms or group messaging apps, to maintain engagement and address urgent matters.
- Plan communication games and activities to help the group better relate to and improve their connection.
- Be aware of technology problems that can hamper or enable communication (e.g., access to devices and Wi-Fi).

Recognise children's and young people's busy lives

- Plan meetings at times suitable for everyone by working within the school timetable and considering individual commitments.
- Make sessions accessible for everyone. Prepare and share your session materials in advance, making sure they are accessible and inclusive for all participants.
- Use interactive, creative and fun activities to increase engagement.



MONITOR

How to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of a Young Advisory Group

Evaluate and Adapt

- Periodically assess the effectiveness of the advisory group in achieving its intended goals, and make adjustments to the format of the forum as necessary based on the emerging needs of Young Advisors.
- Use surveys to see what went well or what could be improved in the running of the group.
- Reflect on the Young Advisors' new experiences of participating in a youth advisory group and changing perspective on nature and learning (i.e., about nature, about online tools, and how to respond to questions).
- Use the group's input to improve decision-making processes and policies.
- Remember, creating a Young Advisory Group requires dedication, inclusivity, and continuous support. By fostering an environment that values youth perspectives and actively incorporates their input, the group can become a powerful tool for positive change and youth engagement.

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My perspective on nature has changed. Before this advisory group I really didn't care about nature and now I do.

“

Make a survey, and ask those who are in the Young Advisory Group to answer the questions, to gain knowledge on their positives and negatives.



TOP TEN TIPS

1 Be clear about which groups of children and young people should be invited to form the Young Advisory Group to achieve its intended goals.

2 Use a range of methods to attract the attention of new members

3 Establish and maintain good relationships with schools, community groups and parents to provide and support participants

4 Make the meetings inclusive and accessible to everyone

5 Ensure suitable timings for meetings

6 Provide varied interactive, creative and fun activities in each session

7 Provide learning opportunities (e.g., give information about nature, using different tools, surveys, and written materials)

8 Be transparent, clear and open when you need to take the lead to direct the work of the advisory group, moving between the role of facilitator, enabler and critical friend.

9 Reward Young Advisors for their participation, to ensure recognition, retention and return

10 Recognise that children and young people have hectic lives, and are heavily dependent on their parents' and teachers' help to get involved in advisory groups

CONTACT

For further information contact:

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More information

INVOLVE and NIHR Reward and recognition for children and young people involved in research - things to consider:

[CYP-reward-and-recognition-Final-April2016.pdf](#) (invo.org.uk)

ASDAN (Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network):

www.asdan.org.uk/home

Benefits Advice Service:

www.invo.org.uk/resource-centre/benefits-advice-service

NHS Youth Forum involving young people as Young Commissioners: Young Commissioners Model | University of East London (uel.ac.uk)

www.england.nhs.uk/get-involved/get-involved/how/forums/nhs-you

