

Young people's voices in  
their education

Why it matters!



## Aim of this workshop



*To reflect on how we can support our young people in having their voices heard and taken seriously in matters that affect them in school.*





The UNCRC defines the child as **a person under 18 years of age**. It acknowledges the primary role of parents and the family in the care and protection of children, as well as the obligation of the State to help them carry out these duties.

The UN Convention consists of 41 articles, each of which details a different type of right. These rights are not ranked in order of importance; instead they interact with one another to form one integrated set of rights. A common approach is to group these articles together under the following themes:

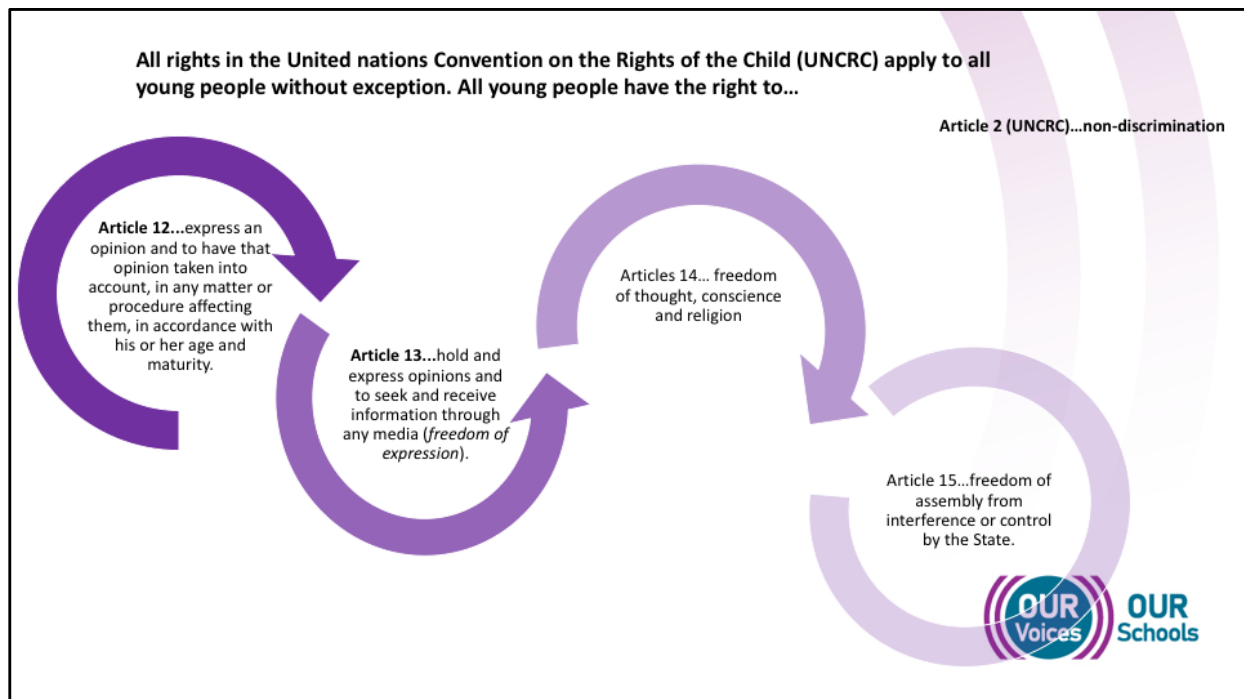
- **Survival rights:** include the child's right to life and the needs that are most basic to existence, such as nutrition, shelter, an adequate living standard, and access to medical services.
- **Development rights:** include the right to education, play, leisure, cultural activities, access to information, and freedom of thought, conscience and religion.
- **Protection rights:** ensure children are safeguarded against all forms of abuse, neglect and exploitation, including special care for refugee children; safeguards for children in the criminal

justice system; protection for children in employment; protection and rehabilitation for children who have suffered exploitation or abuse of any kind.

- **Participation rights:** encompass children's freedom to express opinions, to have a say in matters affecting their own lives, to join associations and to assemble peacefully. As their capacities develop, children should have increasing opportunity to participate in the activities of society, in preparation for adulthood.

The UN Convention includes four articles that are given special emphasis. These are also known as 'general principles'. These rights are the bedrock for securing the additional rights in the UN Convention.

- that all the rights guaranteed by the UNCRC must be available to all children without discrimination of any kind (**Article 2**);
- that the best interests of the child must be a primary consideration in all actions concerning children (**Article 3**);
- that every child has the right to life, survival and development (**Article 6**); and
- that the child's view must be considered and taken into account in all matters affecting him or her (**Article 12**).



**Article 2:** Non-discrimination All rights in the Convention apply to all young people without exception, and the State has an obligation to protect young people from any and all forms of discrimination including that resulting from their parents or guardian's status.

Participation needs to be understood not only through the lens of **Article 12**, but also within the framework of the wider civil rights embodied in the CRC. Article 12 relies on the realisation of these other rights but places additional obligations on States.

- **Article 13**, freedom of expression, asserts the right to hold and express opinions and to seek and receive information through any media.
- **Articles 14...** the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion
- **Article 15...**the right to freedom of assembly from interference or control by the State.

Freedoms of expression and association require the creation of conditions in which young people can form and express views and meet friends and form their own associations. Similarly, if young people are to

participate, they need access to information about their rights, and knowledge and skills in how to exercise them, in order to be able to understand issues affecting them.

In some contexts, although not all, they may need to be assured of privacy and confidentiality, for example, if they wish to express views relating to discrimination.

### **Conceptual Framework for Measuring Outcomes of Adolescent Participation**



## Article 12-The child's opinion

***The child has the right to  
give their opinion on  
matters that affect them  
and for adults to listen  
and take it seriously.***

***The child shall in  
particular be provided  
with suitable  
opportunities to be heard***



### Article 12

The right to express views on all matters affecting them, and to have them given due weight, commonly described as participation, is embodied in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) in Article 12, and applies to all children capable of forming a view. However, its impact and implications take on additional and differing significance during adolescence (Lansdown 2018)



Children and young people's right to have their voices heard is part of the National Agenda.

Ireland signed the Convention in 1992 and in so doing the Government committed to realising these rights for young people.

Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA) National Strategy on children and young people's participation in decision making provides information and advice for government departments about how to support children and young people's meaningful participation.



# Draft National Implementation Framework for Child Participation



An Roinn Leanaí  
agus Gnóthaí Óige  
Department of Children  
and Youth Affairs



the *National Strategy on Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-making* (2015-2020) underpins the DCYA's Framework for implementation

*...support organisations in a self-improvement journey towards adopting best practice in giving children and young people a voice in decision-making.*



Why should young people be involved in decision making about matters that affect them in school?



Young people are actors in their own development with their own rights, not passive recipients.



They have the right to influence decisions that affect them.



Involving young people helps deliver better decisions for them – more relevant and better-informed responses, solutions and outcomes.

Adapted from *Every Child's Right to be Heard*. Published by Save the Children and UNICEF



(Adapted from

[https://www.unicef.org/french/adolescence/files/Every\\_Childs\\_Right\\_to\\_be\\_Heard.pdf](https://www.unicef.org/french/adolescence/files/Every_Childs_Right_to_be_Heard.pdf)

Why should young people be involved in decision making about matters that affect them in school?



It makes us more accountable – by recognising and acting on young people's contributions.



It means that our planning in schools is informed by the real views and perspectives of young people.



Young people benefit from participation – it contributes to their skills, power, confidence, enjoyment.

Adapted from *Every Child's Right to be Heard*. Published by Save the Children and UNICEF





## Young people are experts in their own experience of schooling

Young people have unique perspectives on learning, teaching and schooling; that their insights warrant not only the attention but also the responses of adults; and that they should be afforded opportunities to actively shape their education.



Cook-Sather, 2006

## Find a partner.....

- On what area(s) of school life could our young people have an opportunity to have their voices heard in school now?
- Whose voices would be heard?
- Who should be listening?
- What difference might it make?



Participants are invited to reflect on these questions with a one or two colleagues.

When they return to their tables, there is an opportunity to share conversations and to identify some observations from the reflection.

## Benefits of building participation



Flynn 2013 & 2014





## Development of active, democratic citizens

Schools are the first places where children experience society in all its facets and their experiences can have a profound influence on their attitudes and behaviour in life.

Andreas Schleicher, OECD 2017



Schools should contribute to the development of **active, democratic citizens**. Active participation and having a voice are ways for students to experience and develop democratic attitudes and skills in education.

### Citizenship as practice as opposed to citizenship as status.

Lawy and Biesta 2016

Young people's participation in decision making leads to Capacity development: Meaningful participation enables adolescents to acquire knowledge and skills, build competencies, extend aspirations, and gain confidence. Participation promotes adolescents' capacities for civic engagement, collective organisation, tolerance and respect for others. Societies require citizens with the understanding, skills, and commitment to promote accountability and good governance. Participation enables adolescents to develop those capacities (Lansdown 2018)



When young people  
are consulted seriously,  
it can make them feel,  
often for the first time,  
that the school and the  
class are...



...to some extent, **their** school  
and **their** class...impacting on  
their sense of belonging and  
attachment.





Why young people's voices matter in education



Having viewed the video, at your table,

- What are the key messages for us in the video?
- What could be the benefits of increased participation for our students?



In our school, decisions are constantly being made that affect young people



Doodle created by WordArt.com

School~Self~Evaluation~(SSE)  
 Policy~Development  
 Special~Interest~Groups  
 Student-Led~Projects  
 Reporting  
 Classroom~culture  
 Learning~and~assessment  
 Student~Council  
 Follow-up~to~WSE  
 Board of Management  
 School Management  
 Extra-curricular clubs

## In our school...

- Are young people significantly involved in the making of decisions?
- Which areas see young people most involved?
- Where could our practice improve?



## What voices can we hear in making these decisions?



### Collective

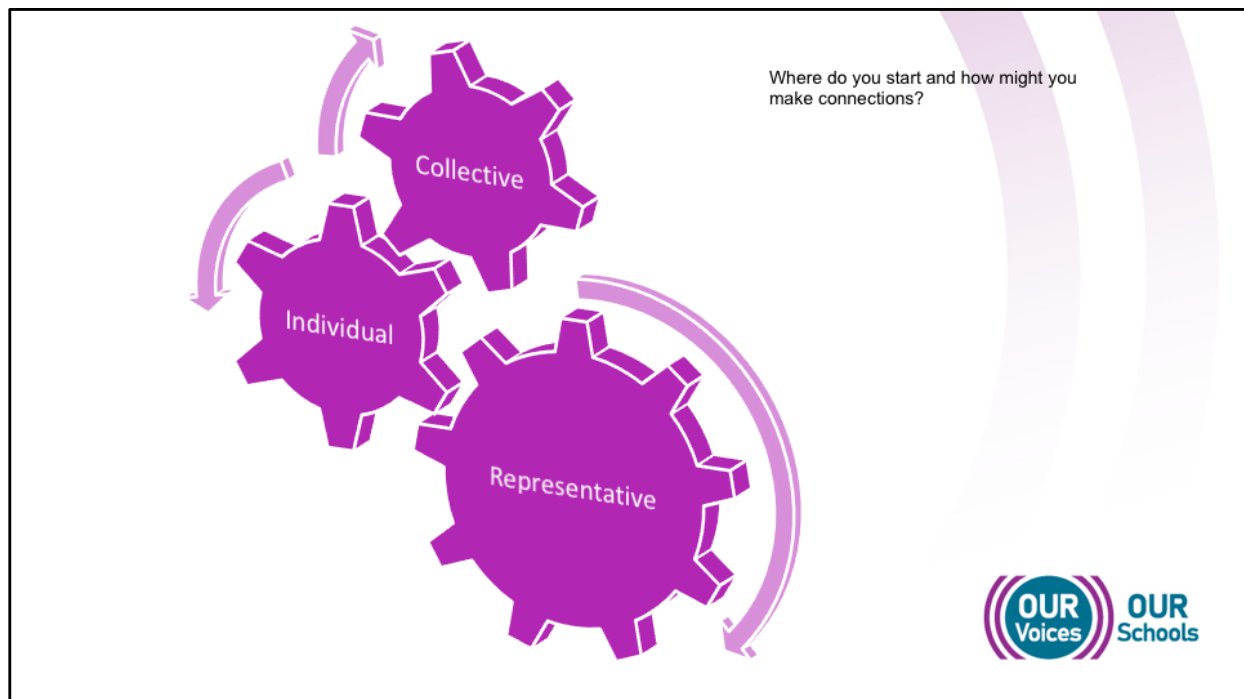
- Whole school
- Year group
- Class group

### Representative

- Class/year representatives
- Student Council
- Special interest groups, e.g. Active School Flag

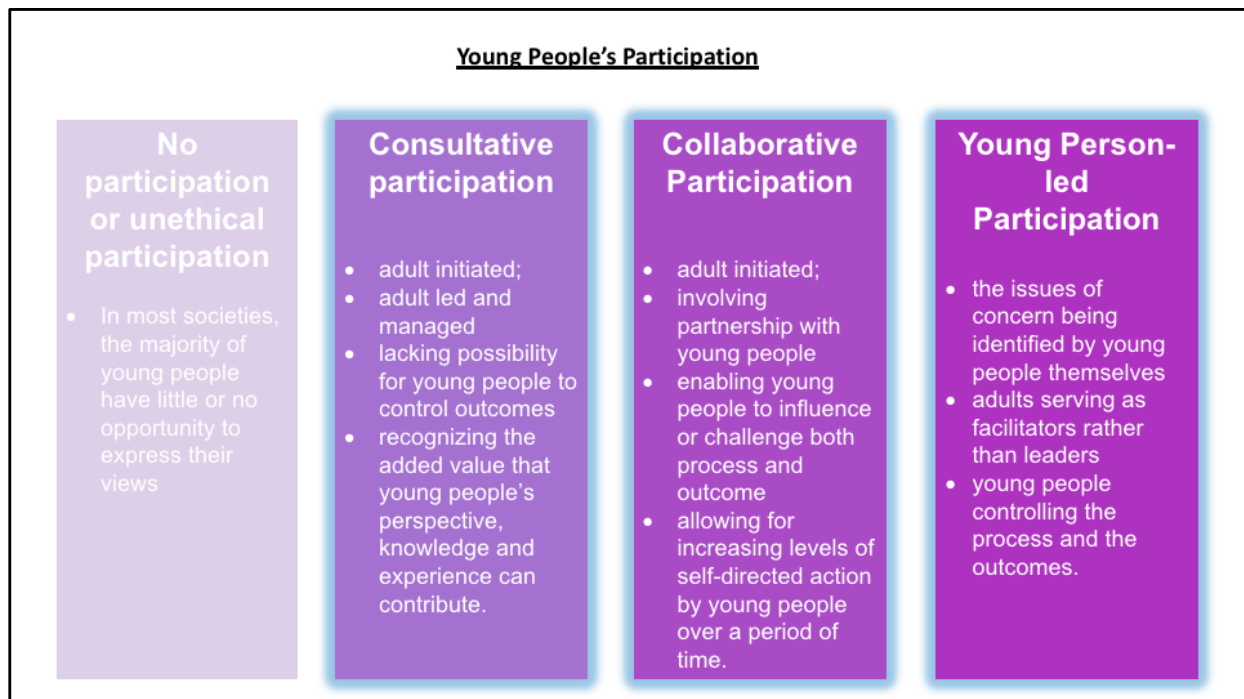
### Individual

- Informal conversations
- Opportunities for individuals to have their voice heard.



These should not be seen as unconnected, discrete domains...there are frequently opportunities for interchange and movement between them.

It is important not to perceive these in terms of a hierarchy of preference...each is legitimate and appropriate in different contexts



Young people can participate in activities, processes and decision-making in broadly three different ways: **consultative**, **collaborative**, or **young person-led**. (Lansdown G & O'Kane C (2014) A Toolkit for Monitoring and Evaluating Children's Participation, Save the Children et al, London

Conceptual Framework for Measuring Outcomes of Adolescent Participation  
[https://www.unicef.org/adolescence/files/Conceptual\\_Framework\\_for\\_Measuring\\_Outcomes\\_of\\_Adolescent\\_Participation\\_March\\_2018.pdf](https://www.unicef.org/adolescence/files/Conceptual_Framework_for_Measuring_Outcomes_of_Adolescent_Participation_March_2018.pdf)

It is important not to perceive them in terms of a hierarchy of preference.

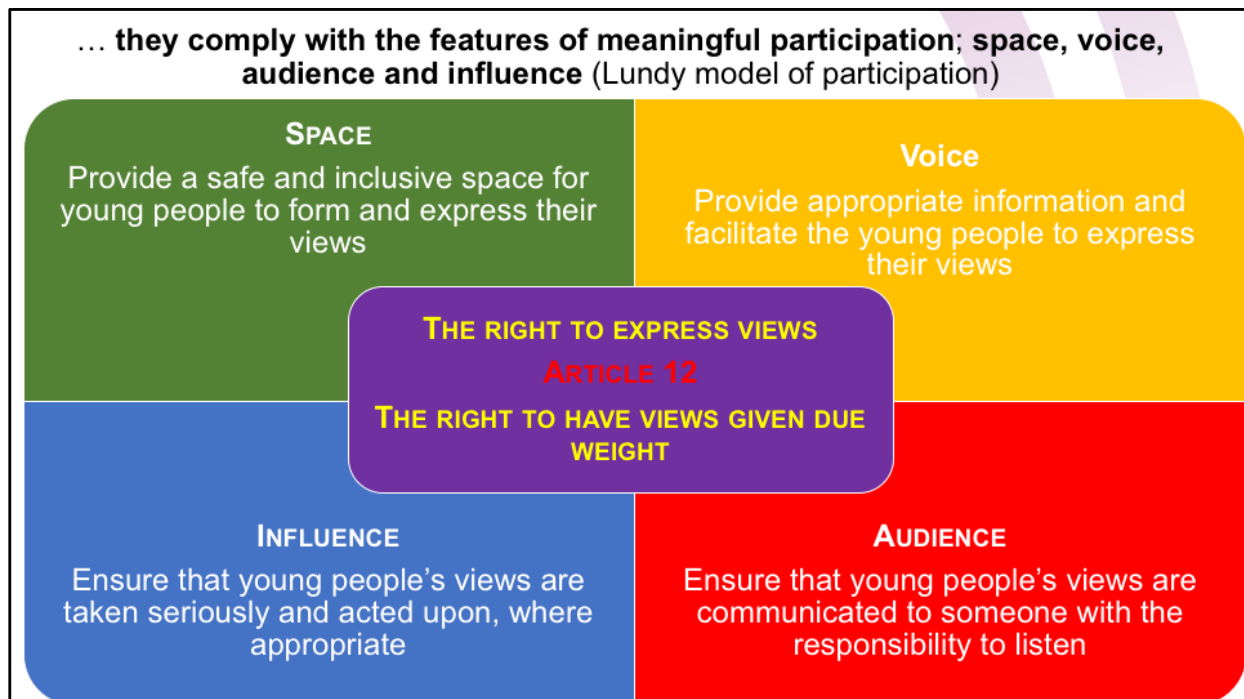
Each mode of participation offers differing degrees of empowerment and influence, but they are all legitimate and appropriate in different contexts, and can be **rights-respecting provided they comply with the features of space, voice, audience and influence, and the nine basic requirements for quality** (from *CRC General Comment No. 12, The right of the child to be heard, CRC/C/GC/12, 2009* )

There is an opportunity here to discuss where young people's participation in your school falls into one or other of these categories



Each mode of participation offers differing degrees of empowerment and influence, but they are all legitimate and appropriate in different contexts, and can be rights-respecting **provided...**





*Our voice Our schools* is based on Lundy's Model of Participation which is grounded in the UNCRC and is focused on a rights-based approach to involving children and young people in decision-making. The model values all forms of participation in decision-making and highlights the importance of the impact and outcomes of young people's views.

Lundy describes four elements for meaningful participation

At the level of any specific participatory activity, attention must be afforded to the specific obligations placed on the adult duty bearers under Article 12 for it to be meaningful and effective.

- **Space:** In order to become increasingly active in influencing matters affecting them, adolescents need to be able to form and express views and they must be afforded the space and time to do so. Adolescents must be given the opportunity to gain the confidence, the time and space to contribute their views.

- **Voice:** Adolescents can express themselves through multiple different media, e.g. digital media, artwork, written, spoken. Appropriate and accessible information is an important pre-requisite for the ability to speak out and express views and negotiate decisions. This needs to be provided in different forms according to the adolescents concerned, for example in relevant languages, in sign language, braille or other forms of augmented communication. Not all adolescents will be able to express themselves easily. The onus is on supporting adults to find ways in which to enable adolescents to communicate their views, concerns or ideas.. It is worth remembering that, according to Article 12, participation rights are based on the capacity to form a view, and not on the ability to express a view in any particular way.
- **Audience:** Central to the right to participate is that adults listen respectfully to what young people have to say. They must have access to the relevant audience for the views being expressed – teachers, senior management, parents, Board of Management. The right to express views and have them given due weight can only be realised if young people's views are heard by those people with the power and authority to act on those views.
- **Influence:** The right to participate does not imply that young people's' views must always be acted on. However, it does require that their views are given proper consideration and that any decision that is subsequently made is reported back to them with an explanation of how and why it was made in the way that it was.

...and **the nine basic requirements for quality.**





Without compliance, participation runs the risk of being tokenistic, manipulative or even coercive.

*CRC General Comment No. 12, The right of the child to be heard, CRC/C/GC/12, 2009*

**Transparent and informative** - young people must be provided with full, accessible, diversity-sensitive and age-appropriate information about their right to express their views freely and their views to be given due weight, and how this participation will take place, its scope, purpose and potential impact

**Voluntary** - young people should never be coerced into expressing views against their wishes and they should be informed that they can cease involvement at any stage

**Respectful** - young people's views have to be treated with respect and they should be provided with opportunities to initiate ideas and

activities. Adults working with young people should acknowledge, respect and build on good examples of young people's participation, for instance, in their contributions to the family, school, culture and the work environment. They also need an understanding of the socio-economic, environmental and cultural context of young people's lives. Persons and organizations working for and with young people should also respect young people's views with regard to participation in public events;

**Relevant** - the issues on which young people have the right to express their views must be of real relevance to their lives and enable them to draw on their knowledge, skills and abilities. In addition, space needs to be created to enable young people to highlight and address the issues they themselves identify as relevant and important;

**Young person-friendly** - environments and working methods should be adapted to young people's capacities. Adequate time and resources should be made available to ensure that young people are adequately prepared and have the confidence and opportunity to contribute their views. Consideration needs to be given to the fact that young people will need differing levels of support and forms of involvement according to their age and evolving capacities;

**Inclusive** - participation must be inclusive, avoid existing patterns of discrimination, and encourage opportunities for marginalized young people, including both girls and boys, to be involved. Young people are not a homogenous group and participation needs to provide for equality of opportunity for all, without discrimination on any grounds. Programmes also need to ensure that they are culturally sensitive to young people from all communities;

**Supported by training** - adults need preparation, skills and support to facilitate young people's participation effectively, to provide them, for example, with skills in listening, working jointly with young people and engaging young people effectively in accordance with their evolving capacities. Young people themselves can be involved as trainers and facilitators on how to promote effective participation; they require capacity-building to strengthen their skills in, for example, effective participation awareness of their rights, and training in organizing meetings, raising funds, dealing with the media, public speaking and advocacy

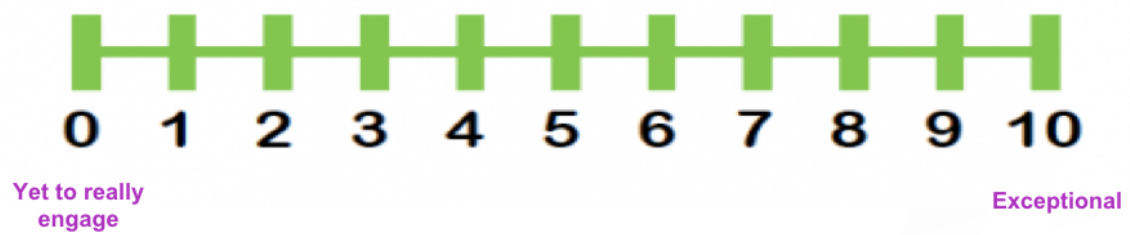
**Safe and sensitive to risk** - in certain situations, expression of views may

involve risks. Adults have a responsibility towards the young people with whom they work and must take every precaution to minimize the risk to young people of violence, exploitation or any other negative consequence of their participation. Action necessary to provide appropriate protection will include the development of a clear child-protection strategy which recognizes the particular risks faced by some groups of young people, and the extra barriers they face in obtaining help. Young people must be aware of their right to be protected from harm and know where to go for help if needed. Investment in working with families and communities is important in order to build understanding of the value and implications of participation, and to minimize the risks to which young people may otherwise be exposed;

**Accountable** - a commitment to follow-up and evaluation is essential. For example, in any research or consultative process, young people must be informed as to how their views have been interpreted and used and, where necessary, provided with the opportunity to challenge and influence the analysis of the findings. Young people are also entitled to be provided with clear feedback on how their participation has influenced any outcomes. Wherever appropriate, young people should be given the opportunity to participate in follow-up processes or activities. Monitoring and evaluation of young people's participation needs to be undertaken, where possible, with young people themselves.

Where are we on a...

...continuum of quality participation





## Now what?

- Why are we where we are on the continuum?
- How could we move up to the next number?
- What can I do?

