

Active citizenship: learning resources for topical issues

5. Local democracy



Introduction for staff

Many recent initiatives and proposals have been designed to encourage the involvement of young people in decision-making. Every Child Matters, the Youth Matters Green Paper, the White Paper on Further Education ‘Raising Skills: Improving Life Chances’, the LSC Learner Involvement Strategy and the 14–19 reforms all stress the importance of giving young people a voice, particularly about matters that directly affect them. However, it is still the case that only a small number of young people participate in decision-making structures in their local communities.

Most local authorities are keen to engage with young people, but cannot find successful ways of doing this. Traditional local authority meetings and structures can seem alienating and irrelevant to young people and attempts are being made to change this.

Citizenship learning opportunities

Citizenship education is all about developing informed opinions, expressing those opinions and being heard. It can help young people gain the knowledge, skills, and especially the motivation, required to get involved in their localities. The Local Democracy Campaign has instituted a number of strategies as part of Local Democracy Week in October each year. It provides materials to support activities such as ‘Bring Your Councillor to School’ days, ‘I’m a Councillor, Get Me Out of Here, Political Speed Dating, and many others.

Through citizenship learning, young people can be given the opportunity to find out what decisions are being made in their communities, discuss and debate these with people who make and carry out the decisions, and perhaps influence these decisions through their own actions.

The materials can be used to encourage young people to take up these opportunities and to create their own. They include activities for the teaching/training room as well as ideas for further research and action. They are suitable for learners working at levels 2 and 3 but can be adapted to suit young people studying at different levels. The materials help to meet learning objectives identified in *Play your part: post-16 citizenship* QCA guidance (QCA, 2004). Study of local democracy can be used to illustrate the key concepts of democracy, rights and responsibilities in the programme of study for key stage 4 citizenship (from September 2008). Local democracy also features in the range and content as ‘actions citizens can take in democratic and electoral processes to influence decisions locally, nationally and beyond’.



Suggestions for using the materials

- Find out what the learners already know (or don't know) about who make decisions in their local area, and who has responsibility for which services. You can use the quiz 'Do you know who does what?' as a paired activity or as a 'pub quiz' team game. The information sheet on local democracy can be used either to help pairs, or to follow up the team quiz.
- The Simulation, 'Community Plan' introduces young people to the way in which organisations work together in a Local Strategic Partnership. You will need copies of the six role cards, a set for each group of six participants, and copies of the agenda, one for each participant. Run the activity as follows:
 - Give out the role cards randomly and ask participants to spend some time researching the role they have been given, using the websites addresses provided. All participants with the same role card could work together during this stage of the activity.
 - Ask participants to work in mixed groups of six, so that each group makes up a committee of the Local Strategic partnership, seated around a table. Double-up some of the roles if participant numbers do not divide by six. Alternatively, ask for six volunteers to role play the committee in a 'fish bowl' – i.e. in the centre of the room with the rest of the group observing.
 - Give a copy of the agenda to each participant, and ask the Leaders of the Council to chair their committees. They cannot vote on an issue unless there is a tie (if one or more participants abstain).
 - Allow 50 minutes for the committee(s) to discuss and agree the agenda items.
 - Ask a spokesperson from each group to call out which option they had selected on each item: (a), (b), (c), or (d). Where 'other' options were selected, note them on the white board for discussion. Discuss whether some were more popular options than others.
 - Put participants into groups made up of one role – i.e. all young mayors, all leaders of the council etc. Ask them to discuss which of the agenda items could most affect them.
- 'Getting heard in your community' provides a range of ideas for ways in which young people can get their voices heard. You could ask them to work in groups and find out more about the various possibilities.
- One way in which young people can be heard, is by involving them in training adults to listen to them. The activity, 'What works best?' enables young people to focus on what things are most important when they are being consulted or involved in decision-making. Sometimes paying fares might be just as important to them as treating them with respect. The activity can also be used with adults.
- Finally, it may be that your learners would like to make a change in their own learning organisation. The activity 'Making a change closer to home' provides advice that should prevent hostility from senior managers, and encourages the young people to behave responsibly.

Local Democracy



We all live in communities – maybe a city, a borough, a town, an estate or a village. We also belong to friendship groups, families, ethnic groups, churches, clubs and societies. We learn and work in schools, colleges, youth groups, training organisations and workplaces. In each of these different kinds of community, decisions are made that affect us.

Sometimes the decision-making structures are formal – backed up by laws; sometimes they are informal, and just agreed between members of the group. But we shouldn't leave the decision-making to just a few people. We can all get more involved and make sure that our voice is heard. Decisions in local areas are made by local authorities, various public and private organisations, and voluntary groups.

Local authorities

There are different kinds of local authority around the country: metropolitan and borough; unitary, district and county. There are 410 authorities in total in England and Wales, and they have responsibility for a wide range of services: things like schools, the environment, fire service, planning, housing, social services, leisure facilities, libraries, or waste collection – in fact things that affect us all, but that we mostly take for granted.

The everyday work of the authority is carried out by council officials who are paid employees. Local authorities are funded partly by central government, but also by local people through the council tax. Local councillors are elected to represent people in their 'ward' or area. There are over 21,000 of them serving on local authorities in England and Wales. Councillors do not get salaries and are not employed by the council. They can claim allowances which cover the costs of their work. Councillors make decisions about local issues and provide a voice for the people they represent. You can find out more about the role of a councillor and who your local councillors are by visiting www.councillor.gov.uk.

In rural areas, there are also elected parish councils. There are over 10,000 parish councillors in England and Wales. It is their job to look after village halls, war memorials, playing fields, etc. They also have a responsibility to protect public footpaths, and they must be notified about all local planning applications.

Public and private bodies

There are many other organisations in every local area which provide services that the council is not responsible for. Examples are the Primary Care Trusts (providing health and social care); the Connexions Service (giving careers advice to young people); the local police force; the Learning and Skills Council (overseeing post-16 and adult education and training); bus and train companies; and the Chamber of Commerce (representing local business).

Community and voluntary groups

In addition, different groups provide services that are not available through a local authority or other organisations. They are not-for-profit organisations and charities, and some have paid staff, while some do not. They can receive funding from local or central government. Examples of such groups are those working with older people, ethnic minorities or the disabled. They include Age Concern, Citizens' Advice Bureau, Shopmobility, Divert Trust, Prince's Trust. You can find examples of community and voluntary groups working in your own area.

Do you know who does what?

Work in pairs to discuss who does what in a local area. Write the number of each item in the most appropriate row. You may think that some items should go in more than one row. And you may think that the job is done by an organisation not listed here. If so, put it in the 'other' row. You may have to guess!

Organisation	Responsible for...
Local Authority	
Primary Care Trust	
Police Authority	
Police Force	
Chamber of Commerce	
Learning and Skills Council	
Further Education College	
Bus Company	
Age Concern (a voluntary organisation)	
Connexions	
Schools	
Other	

RESPONSIBILITIES:	8. Parking	15. Youth service
1. Rubbish collection	9. Bus stops	16. Trading standards
2. Quality of dental services	10. Putting the point of view of business	17. Number of district nurses
3. Quality of post-16 education	11. Day care for older people	18. Planning permission
4. Fighting crime	12. Provision of A level courses	19. Preventing anti-social behaviour
5. Career advice and guidance	13. Teaching children to read	20. Decisions about policing
6. Libraries	14. Training bus drivers	21. Adult training
7. Street cleaning		22. Collecting council tax

If you are not sure about some of these responsibilities and if you want to check your answers, the information on page 4 may help you. You could also do your own research using the responsibilities in the list shown above as key words for an internet search.

When you have finished, you can check your answers on the Post-16 Citizenship website at www.post16citizenship.org

Community Plan – A committee simulation

Background

This committee simulation is designed to help you understand the way your local area makes decisions. The Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) is a group of people selected from the different organisations in an area. The LSP has been set up in each area so that more people can be involved in the decision-making about improvement of services and in the development of a community plan. The plan sets out the vision for the area and the targets that will help achieve the vision. Residents are usually also consulted, although not always young people. In this activity, just six groups are represented. Participants carry out research on the roles and then take part in a committee, chaired by the leader of the local council.

Learning objectives

- Demonstrate knowledge and understanding about citizenship issues
- Discuss and debate citizenship issues
- Express and justify a personal opinion to others.

Follow-up work

- You can find out what your local community plan contains by accessing the local authority website.
- You could invite a councillor to discuss the plan with you and hear their comment.
- You could invite a local councillor to observe this simulation and to give feedback on your suggestions.
- You could write your own community plan for the area and send it to the Local Strategic Partnership (care of the local authority).
- In pairs, you could devise a quiz on local decision-making and swap it with another pair's quiz, to see how much they have learned.

These websites will provide more information about each of the roles in the committee:

Leader of the council:

www.councillor.gov.uk

Chair of voluntary services:

www.nacvs.org.uk

Chief superintendent of police:

www.crimeinfo.org.uk

Chief executive of primary care trust:

www.dh.gov.uk/policyandguidance/organisationpolicy/primarycare

Young mayor:

www.binvolved.org.uk/ym

Chair of the Chamber of Commerce:

www.britishchambers.org.uk

Community Plan – Role Cards



Leader of Blogsworth local council

You are an elected councillor and have been chosen by the ruling political group to lead Blogsworth Council. You and your ‘cabinet’ are responsible for council policies, plans and strategies, and for recommending them to the overall Council. You often have to argue the case for these plans with other councillors who do not agree with them.

Your concern about any agreed community plan is that it must be affordable within the finances available. You do not want to put up the council tax, since it is a vote loser!

Chair of the council for voluntary service

You are the appointed chair of Blogsworth council for voluntary service, made up of groups whose work involves helping the homeless, the disabled, disadvantaged children and youth, the elderly and local communities. They work in deprived areas to rebuild the community and provide better living and working conditions. Some members run faith-based and black and minority ethnic projects. You want to make sure that deprived people are not forgotten in the community plan.

Chief superintendent of police

You are a senior ranking officer in the Blogsworth police force, which is run by a police authority and funded partly by government grants and partly from the council tax.

You oversee a number of divisions within the local force. Your main concerns in the community plan relate to community safety and inclusion. You are particularly concerned about reaching out to young people, who often feel that the police ‘pick’ on them on the streets.

Chief executive of the primary care trust

As chief executive of the primary care trust in Blogsworth, you and your team work to improve and develop the services provided by GPs and their teams, by district nurses and health visitors and by pharmacists, dentists and optometrists. You aim to make sure that everyone has equal access to high quality health care. You are responsible for buying services from local hospitals to meet the needs of the area. You want to see in the community plan provision of a clean environment and health-promoting facilities.

Young Mayor

You have been voted in as Young Mayor of your area. This is a new idea; very few areas have a Young Mayor. You serve a one year term of office and are an advocate and spokesperson for Blogsworth’s young people. Working closely with your team of Young Advisors and the Young Citizens Panel, you advise and inform the leader of the council and other decision-making bodies on issues relating to young people. As Young Mayor, you oversee a budget of about £25,000 and you want to see more consultation with young people.

Chair of the chamber of commerce

Chambers of Commerce are local, independent, non-profit making and non party-political organisations, funded by membership subscriptions. Nationally, 135,000 businesses belong to local Chambers, from small start-up businesses to multinational companies, in all commercial and industrial sectors, and from all over the UK. As chair of the Blogsworth Chamber, you are interested in aspects of the community plan that support businesses and provide the rights skills development for local people.



Blogsworth Local Strategic Partnership AGENDA

At this meeting agreement is needed on the best way of achieving the vision for Blogsworth, decided at the last meeting. No more than 10 minutes can be allowed for discussion on each item, and then a vote must be taken on the preferred option. If the 'other' option is selected, the suggestion must be described.

1. Education – to raise achievement of school students in Blogsworth, by

- (a) funding extra out-of-school classes for targeted groups
- (b) providing advisers to work with underachieving schools
- (c) funding more sixth form courses across the town
- (d) other

2. Environment – to increase the amount of recycling of waste, by

- (a) collecting a bigger range of materials from the doorstep
- (b) placing more recycling sites across the town
- (c) raising council tax for households that do not recycle waste
- (d) other

3. Law and order – to reduce anti-social behaviour in the town centre, by

- (a) issuing more anti-social behaviour orders
- (b) installing more CCTV
- (c) encouraging and rewarding residents who report anti-social behaviour
- (d) other

4. Employment – to encourage more businesses to operate in the town, by

- (a) providing free training for staff
- (b) reducing tax for businesses
- (c) improving transport links locally
- (d) other

5. Health – to improve the physical and mental health of vulnerable residents, by

- (a) encouraging every school to meet the National Healthy Schools standard
- (b) providing more day care places for older residents
- (c) providing more adapted accommodation for the disabled
- (d) other

Getting heard in your community

More and more local authorities and the government are realising that they should listen to what young people think about local and national issues. There are lots of ways of being heard, although you might think that some are better than others. For example...



The UK Youth Parliament has over 300 elected MYPs (Members of the Youth Parliament), aged between 11 and 18. Each local education authority represents a UKYP constituency, and about 90% of LEAs across England are currently represented. It aims to give young people a voice which will be heard by local and national government and providers of services for young people.

Who is YOUR MYP?

You can find out more at www.ukyouthparliament.org.uk



Young mayor was one of the roles in the simulation, Community Plan. This is a new idea and not many areas have a young mayor. You can find out more about the young mayor in Lewisham at www.binvolved.org.uk/ym.

Would this be a good idea in your area?



Local democracy campaign is run by the Local Government Association, the UK Youth Parliament, the British Youth Council and the National Youth Agency. There are many resources provided, as well as events and ideas for ways to become more involved in local democracy. In particular, there is one week every year in October called local democracy week (see www.localdemocracyweek.info). For example, as part of this week, *I'm a Councillor, Get me out of here!* takes place on an interactive website where young people pose questions to their local councillors and give their opinions on local and national issues, see www.bigvote.org.uk.

Find out about what happens during local democracy week in your area.



Local youth councils exist in many towns, cities and boroughs.

Is there one in your area?

If so, find out about yours.



School, college or trainee councils operate in most education and training organisations.

How good is yours? If you don't have one, why not start one?

You can get help from the following websites:

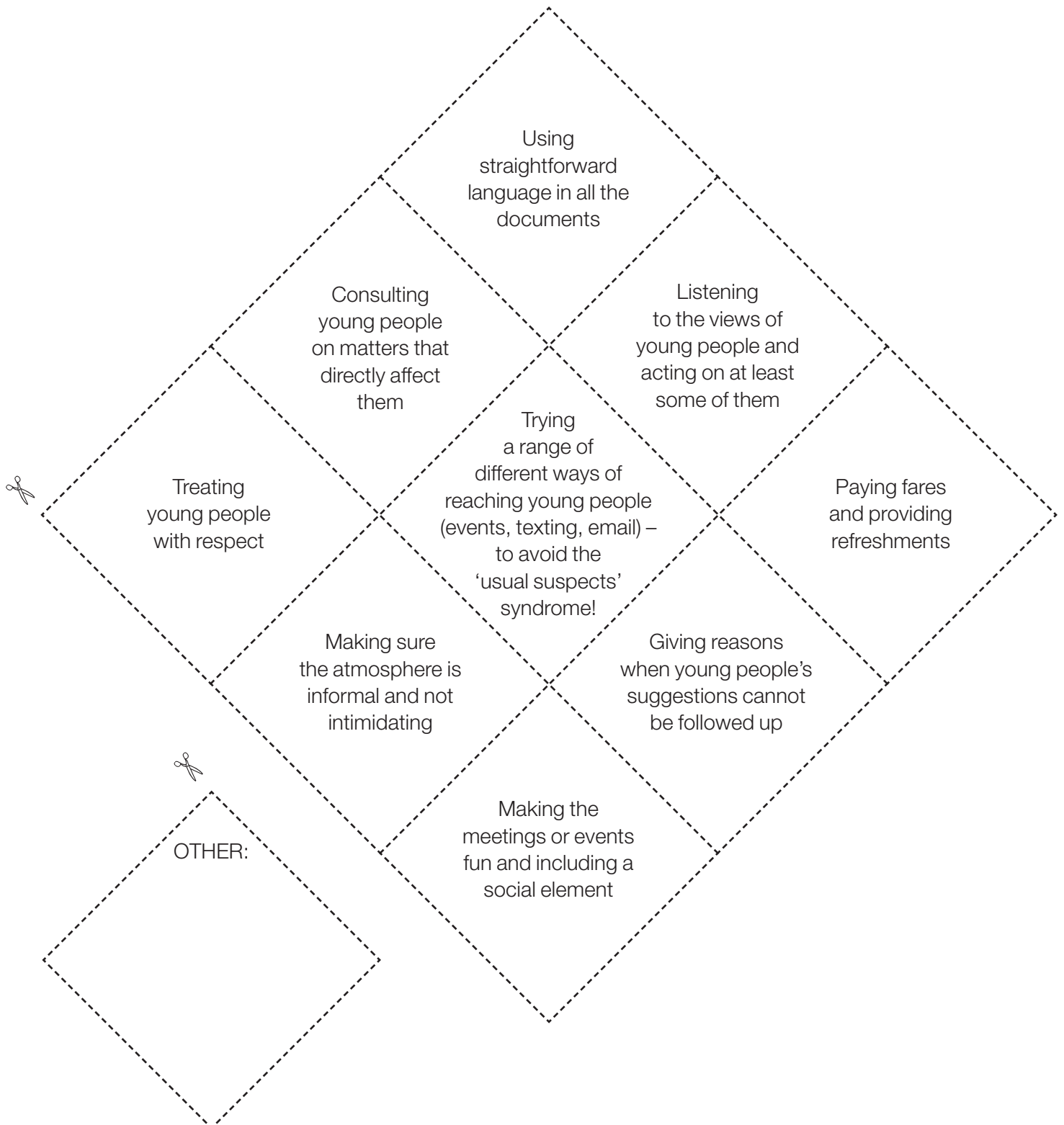
www.nusonline.co.uk (The National Union of Students),

www.schoolcouncils.org (The School Councils UK), and

www.studentvoice.co.uk (The English Secondary Students Association – ESSA).

What works best?

Some approaches are better than others at getting young people's voices heard. Which of the following features would you like to see in any form of consultation? Cut up these cards and rearrange them into your order of importance. Use a Diamond-9 to show your priorities.



Making a change closer to home – running a campaign in your organisation

In most organisations there are things that can be improved, for the benefit of everyone. School, college, trainee and youth councils will usually take up issues with management and negotiate changes. Your organisation may not have a representative council, or perhaps it doesn't have much power. You can learn a lot about democracy by running a campaign to change something yourselves.

Step 1 – Choose your issue

What makes you cross? What could be better? Who would benefit? What needs to happen?

Step 2 – Find out what others think

You may be alone on this one. Other people may not agree that there is a problem, and you can't do this alone. You will need support from others, especially from some adults, if possible.

Step 3 – Raise awareness

If the issue has support, you'll need to make everyone aware of your views and try to begin a debate to find out how things could be different. You could hold a lunchtime meeting, make posters, put an entry on the intranet, give out leaflets, make a presentation, take the issue to the youth council etc.

Step 4 – Decide on the action you want taken and get evidence of support

This could be a petition, a motion passed at the youth council, a vote at a meeting.

Step 5 – Approach the powers-that-be in your organisation with a sensible and properly-costed suggestion

There should be more than one of you and you should make an appointment in advance. You'll need to practice this step, perhaps through role play, to make sure that you are confident, polite and clear in what you are suggesting. If your proposal is rejected, you should ask for reasons. They may be good ones!

Suggested issues

- Better facilities (e.g. sport, music, IT)
- Permitted clothing
- The youth council
- Availability of lockable storage space
- Clubs and societies
- Organisation of a course or programme
- Condition of buildings and outside space
- Learner contracts
- Recycling policy
- Anti-bullying policy
- Anti-racism policy
- Policy on mobile phones

Resources

Democracy Cookbook – Doing politics with young people

Take a pinch of politics and a dash of democracy!
Produced by The Electoral Commission, the Democracy Cookbook is a free comprehensive resource pack containing independent information about how politics works, what our democratic institutions do and why they matter. It was developed in response to demand from youth workers and teachers. To order your free copy email dopolitics@electoralcommission.org.uk, or visit www.dopolitics.co.uk

The Electoral Commission, Trevelyan House,
Great Peter Street, London, SW1P 2HW.

Demgames

A collection of fun games that enable young people to learn about UK democracy and local government topics, including *Captain Campaign* (lead your team to victory), *Money Manager* (be a financial supremo) and *Councillor Quest II* (will you make it through to the end of the day with top points?) Part of the local e-democracy National Project.

www.demgames.org

Engaging with young people in your area – a guide for councillors and MPs

A downloadable guide produced as part of the Local Democracy Campaign, whose aim is to build stronger bridges between local authority leaders and young people, to give young people a real say in designing and providing council services for the community that meet their needs.
Email: ldc@lga.gov.uk

www.lga.gov.uk/Publication.asp?Section=0&id=-A7833880

For hard copy contact the Local Government Association,
Local Government House, Smith Square,
London SW1P 3HZ (code F/378)

Local Government Structure

An up-to-date summary of the structure of local government in England and Wales, including recent changes, new unitary authorities and responsibilities. Downloadable from

www.lga.gov.uk/lga/the_lga/Structure2.pdf

Participation Works

This is an online gateway from which you can access policy, practice, networks and information covering all aspects of young people's participation. It includes access to training resources, information about opportunities for young people to get involved, organisational standards for involving young people and examples of policies.

www.participationworks.org.uk

Hear by Right

Hear by Right is a revised set of standards, with CD-Rom, for organisations across the statutory and voluntary sectors to assess and improve practice and policy on the active involvement of children and young people. The standards framework in *Hear by Right* is based on the Seven S model of organisational change: Shared values; Strategy; Structures; Systems; Staff; Skills and knowledge and Style of leadership.

Hear By Right is produced and supported by the Active Involvement Team of The National Youth Agency. You can contact the Active Involvement Team by email activeinvolvement@nya.org.uk or telephone 0116 242 7409. You can also fax the team on 0116 242 7403.

www.nya.org.uk/hearbyright

Democracy in Schools and the Local Community

A free leaflet on setting up a school council and youth participation in local democracy. It provides teachers with advice based on research and examples of good practice. From The Citizenship Foundation, 63 Gee Street, London EC1V 3RS. Telephone: 020 7566 4141.

Email: info@citizenshipfoundation.org.uk