



Introduction

Local authorities are increasingly looking to enhance the involvement of children and young people in decision making processes. Involvement is about more than consultation (see later section on IYCE for further information on involvement), but consultation is one way in which people can be involved. If you are consulting children and young people there are a number of issues that must be considered in addition to the usual methodological, ethical and practical concerns of any research project. More time, thought and planning is therefore required compared with consulting adult respondents. The purpose of this guideline is to provide a brief overview of some of the specific issues that need to be taken into account.

Defining children and young people

The Market Research Society (MRS) Code of Conduct defines children as those aged under 16 years and young people as those aged 16 and 17 years. The term adult refers to someone aged 18 or over.

Is there a minimum age for conducting research?

The MRS does not recommend a minimum age for research, but conducting research with very young children should be avoided unless absolutely necessary and certainly should not be undertaken by a non-specialist.

How do I recruit children and young people to take part in research?

Recruitment of children and young people to take part in research almost always needs to be done via a 'gatekeeper'. The gatekeeper will usually be a responsible adult, i.e. the person responsible for protecting the child/young person's safety and welfare at the time of the research. Gatekeepers will vary in different contexts but examples might include a parent, a teacher, a carer or a youth worker. It is important to consult and involve gatekeepers during the planning stages of any research project since they will usually be the ones who provide the initial consent to approach children/young people to take part.

Gaining consent

In accordance with MRS guidelines, children under 16 must not be consulted without the consent of a parent, guardian or responsible adult. Where research is being undertaken within a school environment it is suggested that consent is sought from parents / guardians as well as the teacher or other responsible adult at the school.

Consent is a two stage process since it must always be obtained from the child / young person themselves as well as the responsible adult:

Stage 1 The responsible adult must provide consent to approach potential participants.

Stage 2 The child / young person must give their own consent to take part in the research and have the opportunity to decline if they wish.

Informed consent

It is important to introduce the purpose and aims of the research clearly to ensure that both responsible adults and children / young people are able to give their informed consent to taking part. This means that they must be given enough information to understand what is being asked of them. This introductory information should be in writing wherever possible and contact details for the person undertaking the research should always be provided.

It is not essential for consent to be provided in writing unless the subject matter is potentially sensitive, but it is often easier for practical reasons and audit trail purposes. We would recommend that written



consent is obtained wherever possible. The name, relationship and role (e.g. parent) of the responsible adult giving consent should always be recorded in writing.

Different scenarios for giving consent

- **Postal questionnaires:** these should be sent to the responsible adult in the first instance and not the child. Space should be provided for the responsible adult to sign that they have given their consent for the child to complete the questionnaire. Where questionnaires are issued to a large number of children at the same time, a single consent form may be signed.
- **Telephone interviews:** the consent of the responsible adult may be obtained verbally, but they should be sent written confirmation on request.
- **Qualitative research:** written consent forms should be issued to parents / guardians at the recruitment stage asking for permission to ask children to take part.
- **Online research:** a notice explaining that consent is required must be posted, with an explanation of the procedure for obtaining consent. Consent should be verified by letter or phone if it is provided via email. Respondents should be asked to give their age before providing any other personal information and if the age given is under 16, they must be excluded from providing further information until the appropriate consent has been obtained.

What else do I need to consider?

- **Subject matter:** extra care must be taken when consulting over sensitive or potentially contentious topics, for example race, religion or alcohol / drug use.
- **Questionnaire design:** the content should be appropriate to the age of respondents and relevant to their experience. The language used should be simple but not patronising.
- **Qualitative methods:** group-based activities can be used to encourage participation and promote discussion and the presence of peers may put people at ease. One-to-one interviews are not recommended for young children but can work well with teenagers. 'Friendship pair' interviews can be another useful technique.
- **Venue:** research should only be conducted in safe and appropriate environments where children / young people feel comfortable and relaxed.
- **Personal safety:** precautions must be taken to ensure that research does not harm or adversely affect participants. The MRS recommends that interviewers who will have contact with children are checked against information held by the Criminal Records Bureau (CRB). This process is known as Disclosure.
- **Incentives:** any incentives used should be suitable for the age of the child / young person and appropriate to the task required.
- **Feedback:** as with all research, the results must be fed back to participants. Asking for feedback on the findings and their experience of being consulted might also help improve knowledge of how to engage children / young people in the future.



Commissioning a specialist

Since research with children and young people requires specialist approaches, it is often most advisable to commission someone with the appropriate expertise in this area to carry out the work. We can help you commission a consultant with the specialist skills for doing this if necessary.

IYCE (Involving Young Citizens Equally)

Within the council, the IYCE team (part of Children & Young People's directorate) are specialists in involving children and young people in decision making. Some of their recommendations for effective involvement include:

- Work with a whole range of approaches
- Avoid creating an 'elite' who are assumed to represent children / young people on every issue
- Meet children / young people on their own territory, at times they choose and in ways that make sense to them
- Give children / young people the chance to influence not just the answers but the questions
- Work on the basis that children / young people are the experts on how to involve them and take their evaluation seriously
- Provide opportunities for enjoyment and the chance to build relationships
- Guarantee a feedback loop

Examples of work developed and supported by the IYCE team:

- **Kirklees Youth Council** - <http://www.kirkleesyc.org.uk>

If you would like to know more, please contact IYCE on 01484 223603

Further information about research with children and young people

The information contained in this guideline is based on the following sources, which are recommended for further reading if required:

- Market Research Society Code and Guidelines [Guidelines for research among children and young people.](#)

What next?

If you would like to know more about this topic or any other aspect of research or consultation, please contact any member of the team:

The Council's Research and Intelligence Team		01481 221000 consultation@kirklees.gov.uk
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