



My Rights, My Say Young Advisors

Summary of activity

May 2025 - January 2026



Introduction

My Rights, My Say supports children in Scotland aged 12 – 15 with additional support needs to understand and exercise their rights to be involved in decisions about their learning. The service is guided by the My Rights, My Say Young Advisors, a group of young people aged 12 – 21 who have lived experience of using the My Rights, My Say service, or who are entitled to additional support for learning in their school or education setting. The Young Advisors are key partners in the service, bringing their own perspectives and experiences to ensure that My Rights, My Say is shaped by what really matters to children and young people. The group contributes in a range of ways; from advising on how information is presented, to helping to design and improve resources, and supporting the service to listen to and respect children's voices. The My Rights, My Say Young Advisors group is supported through a combination of Scottish Government funding and a Young Start grant.

From May to December 2025, the My Rights, My Say Young Advisors met 11 times, with a mixture of online and in-person meetings, including at the Children in Scotland Annual Conference in May 2025. Recent exploratory sessions with group members sought to establish key areas of interest.

There has also been a significant focus in recent sessions on the Scottish Government's programme of education reform, where we have supported the group to engage on different aspects of the reform process. This has included a focus on: learner empowerment, The Curriculum Improvement Cycle, additional support needs, assessment and qualifications.



This document brings together key themes and discussion from across the May to December meetings, and represents individual views, experiences, and priorities of the Young Advisors that we work with.



Feelings about being part of My Rights, My Say Young Advisors

Young people felt positively about being part of and representing the My Rights, My Say Young Advisors. The graphic below shows comments from young people in relation to being part of the group.

This group has helped me get my opinions across about school

I've really enjoyed meeting new people at the in-person sessions who relate to experiences about school and stuff

I'm really glad I joined this group, I love meeting new people

I didn't expect to go to the conference! I wanted to go to represent the group

[The Annual Conference] was amazing!

Emerging themes

Learner empowerment and being listened to

The Young Advisors articulated a range of experiences when exploring their level of agency and empowerment in their learning, and considered what additional support could enhance this. There was agreement that being listened to is important so that young people can get their opinions across and access the support they need, for example regarding lessons, tests, staff, and bullying. Additionally, the group noted the importance of staff asking clear and understandable questions, and answers being both listened to and acted upon.

"It's good to be listened to because you're the person getting the support, you're the one that will be affected"

My Rights, My Say Young Advisor

The Young Advisors also described the impact of not being listened to. Experiences of disempowerment stemmed from staff making assumptions about support needs, leaving young people out of the conversation, being ignored, or not being updated after raising an issue.

The school environment

While there was a mix of both positive and challenging experiences, the school environment emerged as an important concern for the Young Advisors. Comments related to the physical space, school resources, and the social environment.

Challenging experiences at school did not equate with feelings towards learning. For example, one Young Advisor expressed their motivation for learning, but the difficulties of doing it at school. Other Young Advisors agreed with this, noting that a lot of learning takes place outside of school, and a preference for doing work at home rather than in school time, with less pressure and more space to think.

In terms of the physical space, individuals commented on a lack of school funding leading to unfinished, cold, “dangerous” spaces, and broken equipment, which had an impact on learning.

School rules and uniform also came up frequently across sessions. Rules were described as strict, but with a lack enforcement and consequence when they are not followed.

Relationships and bullying

With regard to the social environment, friendship and bullying came up as a recurring theme across the group. While some young people had made friends and appreciated peer support and understanding, it was clear from discussion that there were also challenging experiences relating to socialising and bullying. This was articulated directly during discussion, with members of the group reflecting that it impacted how they felt about school, often causing them to feel unsafe.

“Sometimes I get bullied and it’s hard to make friends.”

My Rights, My Say Young Advisor

Young Advisors commented on inaction from their schools in relation to bullying, noting that they feel there is often a lack of action when it is reported.

“People got bullied and nothing happened.”

My Rights, My Say Young Advisor

Staff skills and qualities

Staff skills and qualities influenced both positive and negative experiences at school. In positive interactions, staff were described as kind, helpful, and understanding. Individual support staff were described as a helpful aspect of school. Young Advisors highlighted important qualities such as being a good listener, being responsive, being friendly and being brave:

“There’s some really nice PSAs – they are kind to you and chatty.”

My Rights, My Say Young Advisor

When describing negative interactions, Young Advisors highlighted examples of shouting, impatience, not listening or understanding. One example notes a lack of training for teachers in additional support needs:

“I don’t think a lot of teachers are trained in special needs. I think teachers who are going to work in support facilities, or who are going to work with children who need support, should be specially trained. It should be a legal requirement to study it.”

My Rights, My Say Young Advisor

Equality and respect

There was a sense of unfairness that was described by members of the group, which often related to equality and respect between adults and students. The Young Advisors gave several examples where they felt they were treated unfairly by school staff, such as teachers skipping the lunch queue and school staff shouting at pupils. Members of the group saw this as unfair treatment, and felt that there were higher expectations for pupil's behaviour.

"We want more respect."

My Rights, My Say Young Advisor

Inequality was also expressed in relation to experience in the school support base, where Young Advisors described being treated differently to others in the school.

"In the enhanced support base, they don't listen to us much. They boss us about and treat us like a primary school and it's really annoying. For example, in the support base we aren't allowed to go outside like other people."

My Rights, My Say Young Advisor

Effective learning and preparing for the future

Across the sessions with the group, much of the discussion centred on effective learning strategies and preparing for the future. Group members highlighted practical and interactive sessions as a useful way to support learning. Examples cited included dissecting a heart, using Bunsen burners, chatting with friends, being able to stand and move around the classroom, and having less time on the school premises. Effective learning was impacted by the school resources, for example using Bunsen burners is no longer possible due to an issue with the school gas supply. There were a number of concerns about the effectiveness of school in general. Many comments referenced lessons feeling "useless", and a lot of negative language was used to describe school.

In terms of preparing for the future, some subjects that Young Advisors would have liked to study were not available in their school. There was a range of support offered in terms of future pathways. Positive experiences included schools signposting to useful websites and helping young people to consider different options and pathways. This did also contribute to confusion, especially when teachers offered contradictory advice. Some Young Advisors relied more on family support when making decisions about the future. School careers advisors were noted as particularly helpful, although it was acknowledged that this is not available in every school.



Assessments and exams

Some of the Young Advisors expressed that school and exams exist as proof of learning, but had mixed feelings about the efficacy of how learning is delivered and captured.

“You have to go to school so you can say you’ve learned things – if you learn things outside of school there’s no evidence – for jobs – grades, qualifications.”

My Rights, My Say Young Advisor

Qualifications were viewed as an important way to access future education or job opportunities, however there were mixed experiences with assessments and exams. In general, this was rated between a ‘low/negative’ and ‘mid/neutral’ experience at school, and views ranged from perceiving exams as helpful checkpoints, to seeing them as stressful. Some Young Advisors reflected that achieving good grades can help to build confidence. The group drew a distinction between assessments and exams, articulating a preference for more ongoing assessments via coursework rather than big exams, which were perceived as more challenging and pressured. Additionally, having the right support influenced feelings towards exams.

AI and technology were also important topics, and Young Advisors expressed concern over AI in relation to exams and coursework, noting the opportunity for cheating or “undermining hard work”. This was balanced with emphasis on the importance of adapting to new technology and its potential use. The nuance and relevance of the conversation was noted by the group.

Further exploration for My Rights, My Say Young Advisors

In January 2026, the Young Advisors took part in a ‘road mapping’ activity, designed to consider goals for the group, and the necessary steps to get there. Key points for further exploration were:

- **Teacher training:** Members of the group felt that there are gaps in teachers’ knowledge and skills for supporting young people with additional support needs, and asked to explore this issue further by sharing their views on teacher training and development.
- **Person centred support:** For example, parents of children with additional support needs having closer ties with guidance staff and more focus on supporting the individual, rather than on specific school subjects, or the reputation of the school.
- **Making change:** The Young Advisors expressed an ambition to make positive change in their school and ensure young people are listened to. This may be through dialogue with those making decisions about education.
- **Share experiences and build skills:** Continued space to share experiences, be heard and be understood was important to the Young Advisors. In relation to this, learning how to deal with issues, build confidence, and work as a team were shared ambitions among the group.



Conclusion

The My Rights, My Say Young Advisors have determined the direction of the group, from logo design, to key discussion areas, to creating ideas for change. While young people have a wide range of experiences at school, discussion has broadly been categorised under the following themes: being listened to, the school environment, relationships and bullying, staff skills and qualities, and preparing for the future. The group has identified areas for further exploration and contributed to recruitment for the next cohort of My Rights, My Say Young Advisors which will take place in February 2026. The Young Advisors are committed to drawing on their own experiences to create change for themselves and others. The Children in Scotland team will continue to support the group to share these views. Within emergent themes, points of crossover with Children in Scotland's Inclusion Ambassadors have been identified. As an organisation, Children in Scotland will bring these perspectives together as we aim to influence policy making.

I have stayed in the group because it's specifically helping people that I know what they're experiencing – I've been through it. I know what can help and I want to help.