



My Rights, My Say
Young Advisors

“Kids will pay attention and learn more if we make lessons more engaging”:

My Rights, My Say Young Advisors’ views on inclusive and engaging learning for young people with additional support needs



About the Young Advisors

The My Rights, My Say Young Advisors are a group of young people aged 12 - 21 who come together to share their views and experiences of education as learners entitled to additional support. The Young Advisors are a key partner in shaping the My Rights, My Say service, which 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 Young Advisors help the service listen to and respect children's voices, views and experiences. We also work with them to design and develop resources, and to influence policymaking related to additional support for learning. The group also directs some of their own work, in line with their priorities around issues in education, with a particular focus on additional support for learning.



The My Rights, My Say Young Advisors are supported by Young Start and the Scottish Government.



The Curriculum, Rights and Holistic Learning – Exploring the Young Advisors' views

It has been clear throughout the delivery of this work that too often learning is not delivered in ways that work for members of the group. This reflects our ongoing work with the Young Advisors across a range of topics, as well as with groups like the [Inclusion Ambassadors](#). Articles 28 and 29 of the UNCRC outline that all children are entitled to an education that develops their personality, talents and abilities to their fullest potential. In secondary school, children and young people should be able to choose subjects in line with their interests, including options for technical and vocational training.¹ This is particularly important for engaging many children with additional support needs in their learning, with members of the group highlighting how engaging learning opportunities can affect their interest, effort and motivation.



"I work more independently when lessons are interesting"

My Rights, My Say Young Advisor

"My support needs will still be the same, but when I'm interested/engaged I might be able to try even harder"

My Rights, My Say Young Advisor



This summary brings together Young Advisors' views on inclusive approaches to learning in Scottish education. It provides guidance for those working in education on how to deliver engaging, holistic learning that develops individual interests and ambitions, upholds children's rights and supports them to achieve their fullest potential. The learning contained within this summary also has important implications for wider curriculum development and design.

¹ Children and Young People's Commissioner Scotland, [Article 28 – I have the right to an education](#).



What makes learning engaging and inclusive?

The Young Advisors told us about their experiences as learners with additional support needs and about the approaches that facilitate more meaningful engagement at school. The group identified a range of contributing factors – outlined below – and shared their hopes for the curriculum.

Active participation in learning

The Young Advisors value opportunities to actively participate in their learning. They described how practical approaches are helpful for absorbing and retaining information and how they benefitted from experiments, diagrams, and visual representations of ideas.

“The best lessons are practical and hands on ... more fun than just writing down lots of stuff ... absorb information better doing something practical”

My Rights, My Say Young Advisor

“School trips make learning more interesting”

My Rights, My Say Young Advisor

“You can learn by doing it”

My Rights, My Say Young Advisor

Opportunities to solve problems and try things out were also helpful, although there were variations in opinion where some felt they learned better with more specific direction from a staff member.

“In science, I learn more by doing my own experiments”

My Rights, My Say Young Advisor

Although the Young Advisors expressed the advantages of experiential learning, group members reported fewer opportunities to learn in this way as they move through school. Some Young Advisors highlighted that limited financial resources appear to be a barrier to embedding more practical learning.

“Practical learning is really fun, but it feels like we are doing those things less and less”

My Rights, My Say Young Advisor

“School doesn't have money and impacts on types of lessons you can do”

My Rights, My Say Young Advisor

Some Young Advisors also told us that they enjoy the theoretical parts of work and expressed the usefulness of learning through listening and reading. This helps demonstrate the need for an understanding of children and young people as individuals, with different learning needs.

“If [the lesson is] only practical, don't feel like properly absorbing everything. Music is the exception”

My Rights, My Say Young Advisor

Applied and relevant learning

Young Advisors repeatedly told us that they want learning to feel useful, relevant to their interests, and make wider connections to life beyond school.

“We learn a bunch of stuff, but won’t help me for the real world”

My Rights, My Say Young Advisor

Understanding the purpose and application of learning helps young people to engage. For example, talking about where mathematical theories appear in everyday life highlights the relevance of the concepts that are taught.

We also heard that contextualising learning outside of exams by making connections to future career pathways and everyday skills helped young people to understand the value of subjects. Additionally, the Young Advisors expressed interest in hearing about the relationship between different subjects.

From a teaching perspective, Young Advisors enjoyed hearing anecdotes from staff that showed their connections to the subject as this helps put learning in context and shared passion and enthusiasm for the topic.

“It makes them more relatable”

My Rights, My Say Young Advisor

Learning “life skills” was also raised as a relevant and important learning point in preparing young people for life beyond school.

“Helping pupils get a job or know how to live after school”

My Rights, My Say Young Advisor

However, the Young Advisors articulated concerns about adults making assumptions about children and young people’s skills and understanding.

“Staff act as if we already know how to do adult things – but no one teaches us”

My Rights, My Say Young Advisor

The learning environment and relationships

The learning environment is an important factor in Young Advisors’ experiences of education. Some Young Advisors described how noisy and busy spaces can be overwhelming, making it harder to participate in classes even if they are engaged in the learning itself. Flexible ways of taking part may help to support learners.

“When I started getting things like a reduced timetable, time out pass, it made school a lot easier. I’m so happy I have a leave early pass to avoid busy corridors”

My Rights, My Say Young Advisor



Young Advisors valued opportunities to learn outside of school. One group member described that a school trip to see a play supported their drama coursework, especially as learning was consolidated through reflection and discussion after the event. Different environments may also link to life skills; for example, navigating public transport as part of a school trip.

One Young Advisor expressed an interest in outdoor learning in relation to their future ambitions.

"I wanna do conservation stuff (I think) when I'm older so if there were lessons on that (outside or inside) that would be rllly cool"

My Rights, My Say Young Advisor



Considering effective learning environments outside of the school classroom is an area of further exploration for the Young Advisors.

Within a classroom setting, young people appreciated opportunities to move around the space and interact with others, although the group had mixed feelings about working with friends or peers. Some found this a useful approach while others found this distracting or preferred working alone.

"Chatting with your friends makes learning more enjoyable"

My Rights, My Say Young Advisor

"I like working by myself but if [I had to work] in a group I'd rather be with friends"

My Rights, My Say Young Advisor

"I work better on my own, but alongside other people"

My Rights, My Say Young Advisor

Supporting a range of solo and group work approaches and flexible classroom environments could support the diversity of young people's needs and preferences.

Positive relationships with school staff and peers were important to creating a constructive learning environment and the Young Advisors emphasised the influence of school staff in how engaging they find lessons. They noted that even if a subject is difficult or they are not interested in it, being understood as individuals helps them to engage. The group highlighted the importance of specific professional learning around supporting young people with additional support needs in addition to subject-specific knowledge.

"If you are doing a job supporting young people in a school you really need to know about ASN and how to support people"

My Rights, My Say Young Advisor

Person-centred learning

Throughout discussion, the Young Advisors emphasised that individualised support, person-centred learning, and enjoyment are essential for supporting meaningful engagement.

“Enjoying things is important – if you don’t enjoy it then it won’t work”

My Rights, My Say Young Advisor

The group told us that young people should have influence on their educational pathways by contributing to curriculum development and linking learning to their individual interests. Knowing young people as individuals allows school staff to tailor activities to support engagement.

“[if there was] a way to make lessons more personable to every pupil, it would work better. A lot of problems caused by not being treated as an individual”

My Rights, My Say Young Advisor

This is especially important for young people with additional support needs. At times, the Young Advisors felt that their individual additional support needs were overlooked and assumptions were made about their individual needs and goals.

“If someone needs support they treat everyone the same”

My Rights, My Say Young Advisor

“Feels like they don’t get to know you, just focus on what they have to teach you”

My Rights, My Say Young Advisor

Measures of success and futures beyond school

The Young Advisors described the influence of exams on their school experience, with some members describing their time in school mainly being spent preparing for an exam. While the group noted that exam results were of particular importance to schools, the Young Advisors were clear in a view that although qualifications are important, progression and success are individual and look different for everyone. The group welcomed ways to celebrate success that is not solely based on academic achievement.

“They say ‘do your best’, but ‘your best’ is never good enough. They need to understand what my best actually is”

My Rights, My Say Young Advisor

“To schools, “being the best” is exams”

My Rights, My Say Young Advisor

“School thinks success = exam results”

My Rights, My Say Young Advisor



We also heard about current pathways to qualifications and Young Advisors’ future aspirations. Some Young Advisors expressed that they could not study the subjects they were most interested in because their schools did not offer an appropriate qualification they could pursue. Group members also reported limited routes for qualifications in some ASN schools and support bases; for example, only being able to study to National 3 level in the support base. Although some Young Advisors reported positive experiences with careers advisors, others felt that career advice did not reflect their interests and future ambitions.

“Careers provision is unsuitable in the support base”

My Rights, My Say Young Advisor

At times, group members reported feeling underestimated.

“Made to feel like our career options are litter picking or car repair”

My Rights, My Say Young Advisor



What adults can do

The Young Advisors expressed their views on engaging learning, their experiences, and hopes for the curriculum as learners with additional support needs.

The group has told us that practical, active, and relevant learning which makes connections between school and life beyond the classroom helps them to engage best. They underlined the need for supportive relationships where they are known as individuals, and a curriculum that can connect with their own specific interests. It is crucial that young people are supported to achieve in line with their ambitions, can access a full range of qualifications within a supportive environment, and that assumptions are not made about their additional support needs. The group valued diverse ways of acknowledging and celebrating success.

We heard from the Young Advisors that engaging lessons help them to feel more motivated, independent, confident, and focused and that this supports their participation. The Young Advisors identified a relationship between engaging lessons and better learning outcomes, also linking this with improved attendance.

“Kids will pay attention and learn more if we make lessons more engaging”

My Rights, My Say Young Advisor

Children in Scotland will continue to support young people to share their views and influence the issues that impact them. We would highlight the Inclusion Ambassadors vision statement² which encapsulates the underlying principles shared through this document.

School should help me be the best I can be.

School is a place where young people learn, socialise, and become prepared for life beyond school.

Success is different for everyone. But it is important that all the adults that children and young people come into contact with in school get to know them as individuals. They should ask, listen and act on what young people say about the support that works best for them.

Centring these principles and bringing focus to engaging, person-centred learning in a supportive environment will help young people to actively participate in their learning and achieve success.

² Enquire – [Inclusion Ambassadors vision statement](#).



Getting in touch

If you would like to find out more about the My Rights My Say Young Advisors and their work on engaging learning, please contact **Sara Kemal**, Participation and Policy Officer:

skemal@childreninscotland.org.uk