

A large teal arrow curves from the top left towards the right. On the right side, three teal circles are arranged vertically. At the bottom, a thick teal curved line sweeps across the page.

# Pupil voice in schools: Ideas for teachers

In March 2024 pupils from the C-Change Creativity Collaborative worked with sound artist and composer Gawain Hewitt to test approaches for encouraging young people to share their views on their learning experiences. Here we present a collation of those approaches as a set of 10 recommended activities that could ideally be delivered as a series, or alternatively as one-off activities.

## Why is pupil voice important?

If we want young people to use their voice, then we need to be sure we are prepared to listen. Children and young people in school might be more concerned with what they think we want to hear than what they really think. It may be that what someone really wants to say is not what we want to hear.

How we set up and manage a room is critical to encouraging relaxed and honest reflection and feedback. Things to consider include how the seating is arranged. Sitting in a circle could feel less hierarchical than facing an adult. The temperature and sound of the room are also things to attend to. Ensuring a room is comfortable helps to bring people's attention to the task in hand. Making sure that the whole room's attention is on the young people tells them that they matter and that we are listening. Making it clear that during this time anything that is said is allowed and will be heard. You may want to work with the young people to set the environment before this piece of work begins.

Warm up activities help to unlock lateral thinking and connect a group to each other and the task. Asking people to answer a question through play dough or mime brings attention onto the subject in a very different way while demonstrating that there is no correct answer to questions asked in this time.

Giving space and time for an answer can encourage deeper and more honest responses. A powerful way to value youth voice is to only allow space for their responses. This would mean that adults do not contribute during the answering time. A consequence of this can be long silences. Using a timer might be helpful for this exercise.

Questions don't have to be set by adults. Asking young people to contribute, shape and refine questions can be very powerful. It may be that adults are answering questions sometimes as well, modelling reflective practice.

Words, writing and talking will not be the most accessible way for all to communicate. Communication through play, art, movement, music and drama can allow different people to

shine as well as reminding us that we communicate with our bodies and our senses as well as with our minds and our mouths. Even those who excel with words may find a different message is communicated when the medium is changed.

For some just allowing a voice to be heard is in itself a radical act of listening. Voice

could be a metaphor for other communication as not all people can communicate verbally. The act of creating and honouring space for this to happen shows that everyone matters, and that their contribution is being taken seriously.

Facilitating youth voice is a practice that will grow through regular engagement. This is true for both the adult leaders and the young people taking part. A regular ten minute session will be more powerful than a one off longer session.

**“For some just allowing a voice to be heard is in itself a radical act of listening.”**



# Ten 10 minute tasks to support youth voice in schools.

Before commencing with this plan you will need to decide on four questions that you want to be answered. There should be a clear purpose to each question, with a commitment from you to make a change of some description as a result of the responses.



## Question Time

Sit in a circle with the cards in the middle. 4 cards with questions on should be scattered so people can see them. 4 blank cards and pens available.

Start the session with one minutes silence.

Explain to the group that we're going to agree a set of questions together, and the reason why this is important.

Ask the group to read the questions out loud taking it in turns. After each question ask if they are happy with the question or want to discard it or rephrase it. Each question gets 1 minute.

### MATERIALS NEEDED

4 cards with your  
pre-determined questions  
4 blank cards  
Pens

Once the pre-determined questions are read, there are four one minute timed sessions to write additional questions. 1 per minute.

You should end with 8 questions to explore over the next set of sessions.

End



## Just Listen

### MATERIALS NEEDED

Your 8 question cards  
from Session 1  
Additional communication  
resources if needed  
Pen and paper

Sit in a circle with the questions from Session 1 in the middle.

Young people answer the questions verbally, in writing or using another accessible method uninterrupted for ten minutes. If there is silence and/or a gap between answers then allow the space.

End



## Sculpture

Give the group 7 minutes to answer one of the questions by making a sculpture out of the provided materials.

3 minutes to share work. Speaking is optional.

End

### MATERIALS NEEDED

Plasticine, play dough,  
lego or similar  
Question cards

# 4

## Group Work

Arrange the group in a circle. Share one question.

Complete as many exercises as you can within 10 minutes

### EXERCISE 1

Count to three, everyone answers at once. Expect it to sound cacophonous. Hopefully fun!

### EXERCISE 2

Answer the question with the rule of one syllable per breath.

For example if you were saying the word elephant, you would breathe in, then verbalise "el" on the out breath, breathe in, verbalise "e" on the out breath, breathe in, verbalise "phant" on the out breath.

Everyone breathe in at once and then start. You should be expecting a messy sustained sound. It may be beautiful. It may be cacophonous. Both are valid.

Do it again. You may need to remind people to breathe in between syllables and keep going.

It may be that people find this very funny. If that's the case let them laugh and join in. And then do it again.

Keep repeating this until it works.

### EXERCISE 3: TELEPHONE

The first person whispers their answer to the question to the next person etc around the room. Last person says it out loud.

### MATERIALS NEEDED

4 cards with your pre-determined questions.  
4 blank cards  
Pens

### VARIATIONS:

- Change the start and end points
- Have multiple start and end points at the same time
- Person at the end chooses the next starter question

### EXERCISE 4: VERBAL PING PONG

In pairs students pass their answers back and forward to each other in a steady rhythm, a bit like a pendulum or a clock ticking. You might find it useful to use an online metronome such as [www.metronomeonline.com/](http://www.metronomeonline.com/)

First student starts with the first word of their answer.

Second student says the first word of their answer. The gap that they leave before answering dictates the speed of the rhythm that they are then to try and keep.

First student leaves same gap that second student left (keeping to the tempo) and then says their second word.

Second student leaves same gap then says their second word

Etc.

This can be performed.

## 5

### That's not me!

Sit in a circle with the cards in the middle. 4 cards with questions on should be scattered so people can see them. 4 blank cards and pens available.

Start the session with one minutes silence.

Explain to the group that we're going to agree a set of questions together, and the reason why this is important.

#### MATERIALS NEEDED

Question cards

Ask the group to read the questions out loud taking it in turns. After each question ask if they are happy with the question or want to discard it or rephrase it. Each question gets 1 minute.

## 6

### Question Review

#### MATERIALS NEEDED

Question cards

Explain to the group that we're going to review the questions we have been exploring.

1 minute per question.

A young person reads the question. The group decide to keep, refine or replace it.

The 8 questions agreed at the end of the session are used for the remainder of the sessions.

## 7

### Follow the line

Share the question card.

Ask young people to use pen and paper to answer the question without using writing or words. They have five minutes to complete this.

Swap with a partner and describe what you see.

You may want to insist that the pen does not leave the paper.

#### MATERIALS NEEDED

One of the question cards  
Blank paper (A4 or A3)  
Pens

# 8

## Sound installation

### MATERIALS NEEDED

Laptops or devices – ideally at least one between two with [reflecting.netlify.app](https://reflecting.netlify.app) pre-loaded  
One of the question cards

Young people go to the website <https://reflecting.netlify.app/>

Press the record button and record their answer the question. (At this point the device may tell you that the website wants to use your microphone. You will need to answer “yes”)

Press stop (the record button will have turned to a stop button)

Press play to hear the sound play back. It will repeat continually (in sound and music this can be called “looping”)

Use the buttons at the bottom to change the sounds.

Share the work with each other. If there is time you can ask the young people to place the devices around the room to create an exhibition of sound. The idea is to create an interesting space where you have to explore it with your ears and bodies to find different experiences of the sound.



## Tips

Place the devices around the room

Is the device placed in a way that makes the experience interesting or different?

Can several young people work together to make something with their devices where they interact?



Does the whole room make sense? So when exploring the room is it a sonic experience?

Variation for young people working at different levels.

## Variation for young people working at different levels.

This website can be used to encourage verbal or non-verbal vocalisations.

Recording their name into the website and then manipulating it can in itself be a powerful exercise in giving attention to a young person’s voice.

Have one device for the whole class. If possible use an interactive whiteboard or another large screen.

Child records their voice into the website and manipulates it.

# 9

## Follow the line

Share the question card.

Ask young people to use pen and paper to answer the question without using writing or words. They have five minutes to complete this.

Swap with a partner and describe what you see.

You may want to insist that the pen does not leave the paper.

### MATERIALS NEEDED

One of the question cards  
Blank paper (A4 or A3)  
Pens

# 10

## Just Listen

Sit in a circle with the questions in the middle.

Repeat the exercise from Session 2: Young people answer questions uninterrupted for ten minutes. If there is silence then allow the silence.

Invite young people to share what they have liked/not liked about this process. This could be a discussion, or they could use one of the methods used during the past 10 sessions to share their answers.

### MATERIALS NEEDED

Question cards







# Additional exercises

These additional exercises can be swapped out for any of the sessions above. It may be that these are more accessible or more suitable for your group.

For these exercises visit <https://murmuration.london/>. Bring the website up onto a shared web device. This works particularly well with an inactive whiteboard

## Make a sound

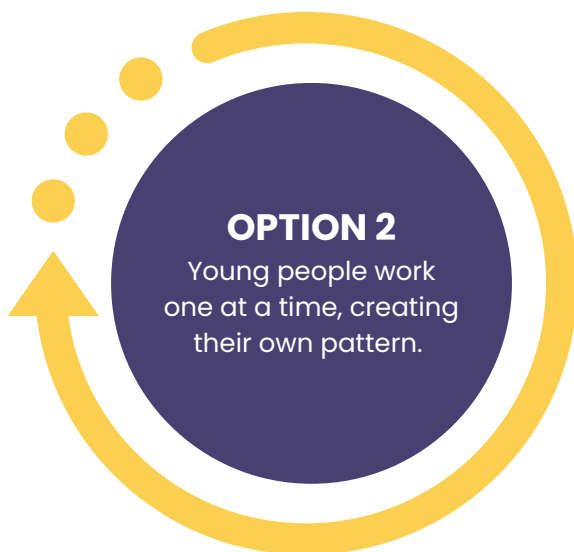
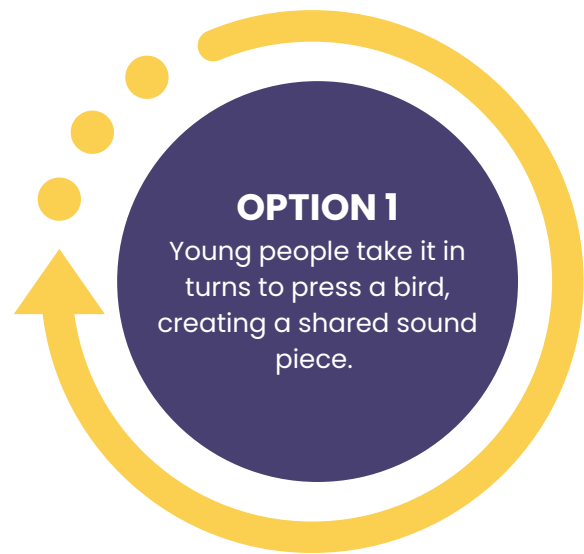
For this exercise use the link on the left with yellow and orange squares. The instrument changes every month on this site so it will be the same experience but with a new sound.

Bring the website up onto a shared web device.

Invite one young person to come to the device and explore.

Allow them to make any sound that they want.

Continue, taking turns.



## Musical Patterns

For this exercise use the link on the right with the birds.

Bring the website up onto a shared web device.

Click a bird to make it sound.

Click it again to stop it.

Use the plus and minus sounds at the top to speed up and slow down the piece.

This guide has been produced by Gawain Hewitt. Gawain is an artist who has a deep passion for spontaneous music creation, interface design and computer code. He believes that creativity is an essential practice for well-being, and has been a vocal advocate for the therapeutic benefits of music and art. Recent projects include "I Long For Silence", an installation on the sound of the NHS, "Scoring Mental Health" a collaborative composition on the sound of Mental Health for BBC Radio 3 and an accessible Harp instrument for Drake Music and the London Philharmonic Orchestra's Orchlub project.

Gawain is a lead artist for Sound Young Minds, a music and mental health project run by City Of London Sinfonia. Working with children in Bethlem, Springfield and Lavender Walk Hospital Schools, Sound Young Minds won the RPS Impact Award in 2020. In 2023 Gawain's piece "I Long For Silence" became part of the Wellcome Collection and he was featured as one of @MastercardUK music trailblazers ahead of The BRIT Awards 2024. Gawain is currently working on a movement-sensing accessible musical instrument for the Amber Trust and new accessible musical instruments for Orchlub.

[www.gawainhewitt.co.uk](http://www.gawainhewitt.co.uk)



With grateful thanks for inputting into this guide to staff and students from Hinderton School (Ellesmere Port); Kelsall Primary School (Tarpurley); St Bernard's Primary and Nursery School (Ellesmere Port); St Mary's Catholic College (Wallasey); St John Plessington (Bebington); St Joseph's Catholic Primary School (Wallasey) and the C Change team.

For further information, or if you would like to discuss a co-created pupil voice workshop for your evaluation please contact [abigildamoreassociates.com/contact](http://abigildamoreassociates.com/contact).



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