

EX POST PAPER

Youth participation in the city of Leicester

When you find new ways to hear, you hear new things.

Involving young people in P/CVE approaches has become more common across the European Union. Their involvement is meaningful in multiple ways: they have valuable input for discussions on the prevention of radicalisation, but above all for policy and decision-making processes. Involving young people in the development of a local P/CVE approach is still done with a **'ticking the box'-mentality** in many cities, but not in Leicester.

The city of Leicester has taken youth participation to a higher level with their Young People's Council, the Young Consultants and multiple inspiring initiatives involving youth. The RAN study visit to Leicester was an opportunity to see how the city has involved young people in the setting up and implementation of the local P/CVE approach as well as in decision-making processes.

This paper was written by **Fenna Keijzer** and **Pomme Woltman**, RAN Centre of Excellence.

The views expressed in this paper are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the RAN Centre of Excellence, the European Commission or any other institution or participant from the RAN study visit.

Introduction – current situation in Leicester

The county of Leicestershire does not publish information on local counter-terrorism activities, so there is no clear synopsis of the local situation. However, local Prevent coordinators prepare an action plan based on their knowledge of the local profile, and this plan is [published](#) annually on the Leicester Prevent website (Prevent, 2017).

With regard to demographics, Leicester has the largest long-term and non-UK born population in the East Midlands. And the city is becoming even more diverse, partly due to inward migration. As explained by Leicester City Council, “There are at least three different groups of recent, new arrivals. The first comprised people of Somali background arrived from the Netherlands, Sweden and Denmark in the 2000s. The second group were economic migrants, originating mainly from Eastern Europe. Finally, there are asylum seekers and refugees who first began to arrive in the 1990s. This group has comprised people from the Balkans, Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan, Turkish Kurds and sub-Saharan Africa, such as Zimbabwe”. (Leicester City Council).

With the establishment of the Prevent Duty (see box) in the United Kingdom, Leicester developed an extensive P/CVE approach and has a duty to safeguard vulnerable groups in society (Leicester City Council, 2018).

Radicalisation in Leicester

Radicalisation risks are dominated by Daesh. Historic Al Qaeda networks with particular links to North African countries also remain a concern. Neo-Nazi activities and funding are a smaller but notable problem. In the past, there have been problems with the Somalian terrorist group al-Shabaab. The problems have become fewer, but there is some concern that its influence may be increasing once again.

Prevent Duty

In order for schools and childcare providers to fulfil the Prevent duty, it is essential that staff are able to identify children who may be vulnerable to radicalisation, and know what to do when they are identified. Protecting children from the risk of radicalisation should be seen as part of schools’ and childcare providers’ wider safeguarding duties, and is similar in nature to protecting children from other harms (e.g. drugs, gangs, neglect, sexual exploitation), whether these come from within their family or are the product of outside influences ¹.

Leicester has experienced two significant far-right demonstrations and while the activities of these groups are no longer as visible, hostility to both immigrant and Muslim communities remains in some areas of the city and county.

Leicester has a sophisticated and successful Prevent programme, but terrorism is not the main concern for most inhabitants; indeed, combatting fatigue about topics relevant to P/CVE is a challenge today, as is keeping communities alive to the risks of radicalisation.

Youth participation in Leicester

In Leicester, youth work and youth participation have a long relationship. However, with a reduction in youth services nationally and a weakened national platform, youth participation has since received less attention and investment. Children and young people’s services have been hit hard by austerity, and with youth services nationally disappearing, youth work and participation has never been more relevant.

The Children’s Society, a charity protecting vulnerable children, passionately believes in the

voice of the child. Their wellbeing research shows that 'choice' and 'having your voice heard' are important in a child's life and are the factors most relevant to children's overall wellbeing (The Children's Society).

Youth participation initiatives should also be genuine, and not driven by a 'ticking-the-box' mentality; they should have the potential to have a significant impact on overall decision-making processes.

With this in mind, the Leicester City Youth Service has worked hard to maintain a distinct youth service and has supported young people over the years to take ownership of the political agenda.

Every child, whatever their age or ability, is capable of self-expression. Children's imaginations, ideas, opinions, feelings, needs and worries can be expressed in many different ways – through words for those able to talk or sign, as well as physical movements and body language, non-verbal sounds, or creative expression like play, dance, music and art.

In Leicester, distinct youth services have been created through a Young People's Council, the Young Consultants and several inspiring projects. Leicester's successful youth participation strategy involves giving young people a voice across all services within the Children's department.

Following up on the study visit to Leicester, this paper outlines the practical basics with regard to local youth participation, and explains what we can learn from the inspiring examples offered by the City of Leicester.

Why and how to integrate youth participation in the local P/CVE approach

67% of lone actors tell others, when they are planning to commit an attack. (Gill, 2018)

This statistic demonstrates why local P/CVE approaches need active participation across different communities to be successful. Everyone must be on board, including young people. Also, young people account by far for the largest group of individuals joining violent extremist groups¹. Young people were previously considered merely as the source of the radicalisation problem, but now we realise they are also an underexplored resource in the fight against extremism. A decision to not involve young people excludes a big group. This can eventually result in these people feeling left out, and not part of society, which supports the process of radicalisation and undermines P/CVE work.

The 10 Standards of Involvement

Leicester has developed a set of 'Standards of Involvement', and seems to implement these standards where possible:

1) NOTICE – Sufficient notice should be given to children and young people, their parents/carers and respective workers (youth workers, carers and other frontline practitioners) when requesting their participation and active involvement.

2) NEUTRALITY – Participation should never be a matter of politics and always be a matter of equal opportunity.

¹ (1) Euer, K., van Vossolle, A., Groenen, A., & Van Bouchaute, K. More Hogeschool, T. & APART. (2014). *Strengthening Resilience against Violent Radicalisation (STRESAVIORA). Part I: Literature analysis*

(HOME/2011/ISEC/AG/4000002547). Retrieved from https://www.bounce-resiliencetools.eu/sites/default/files/content/download/files/stresaviora_research_report_part_3_0.pdf

3) **FEEDBACK/EVALUATION** – Evaluation of participation and its impact, alongside providing timely feedback to children, young people or parents, is essential. Without these processes, children, young people and parent involvement is tokenistic.

4) **INFORMATION** – Children, young people and parents or carers must be informed in a clear way, taking into account age, language, disability, access, and, from the outset, what level of influence they will have in any participatory activity. Time and creativity are needed to ensure this happens.

5) **THE LADDER OF PARTICIPATION** – Consultation is the first step on the ladder of participation that should lead to children, young people and parents or carers full and active involvement in services. It is however not the only step. Consultation should always be age-appropriate, creative and fun, and consider the experience and individual needs of different children, young people and adults.

6) **REMUNERATION** – Payment, reward or the covering of expenses is an essential consideration. Leicester City Council now has a Reward and Remuneration Policy for Involvement which outlines clearly all aspects of this.

7) **RECOGNITION** – Accreditation, celebration and recognition of children, young people and parent or carer participation should be evident. Certificates, award ceremonies, celebratory events, publicity and positive media are just some examples of how this can be achieved. Asking those individuals involved themselves how they wish to be recognised is, however, always the most effective option.

8) **THE BASICS** – Ensure any participatory project, event or activity meets the basic requirements to ensure children, young people, parents and carers can actually participate.

- Time: be aware of educational, work, or childcare commitments.
- Venue: accessible, safe, easy to find, comfortable and welcoming.
- Transport: costs, how to get there and how to get home.
- Food or refreshments: a necessity and an incentive!

9) **INCLUSIVITY** – Enabling different children, young people and parents or carers to participate means consideration of the barriers facing certain groups and finding ways to meet their differing needs. Consider or seek advice on issues e.g. consent, protection of identity, sexuality, specialist transport or access, dietary requirements, culture and religious identity.

10) **RESPECT** – Children, young people and families; their involvement and contributions, deserve the same level of respect afforded to any of the professionals you work with.

The seven DOS AND DON'TS FOR EFFECTIVE ENGAGEMENT

- DO** actively support young people's involvement.
- DO** have a clear objective.
- DON'T** be tempted to pressure young people to get involved too quickly.
- DO** listen to young people's professionalism, and be prepared to take advice.
- DO** be prepared to provide those young people you engage, with detailed and accurate data concerning your organisation and the process in which they are being invited to participate.
- DO** be prepared to provide feedback in a timely manner.
- DON'T** be afraid to change your initial plans for their involvement.

Ladder of participation

Youth participation can take very different forms, varying from adults using young people to support their own causes, to shared decision-making processes and projects initiated by young people. These variations in levels of youth involvement imply very different visions of youth participation.

Young people are often better placed than adults to reduce the likelihood of radicalisation. They can mediate between those who are radicalised and the larger community. And because they know other young people, can identify those at risk, but also understand why some young people might join violent groups, they can be in a position to influence both their elders and those who radicalise. Taking this into account, a certain level of involvement and participation by young people is essential for their full potential to be realised. Although authorities might see the lowest level of involvement as the safest and most controllable, this level is not likely to have the impact on which the authorities are counting. Similarly, higher levels of involvement might be regarded as less easy to control and therefore more risky. However, a higher level of participation is more likely to lead to the impact that the authorities hope to see. All in all, minimal involvement leads to minimal impact, and maximum involvement, leads to maximum impact.

A description of the 'Ladder of participation' by Roger Hart is attached to this paper². The ladder explains the different levels of youth participation. Reaching the highest rung on the ladder is not necessarily the aim for every youth participation initiative. Nonetheless, each initiative could strive

for the appropriate maximum level of youth participation for each individual project or programme.

The Leicester City Young People's Council – how to implement the 10 standards of involvement

*"It is heart-breaking when you have so much to say, but no one listens, which upsets and disillusioned me. It's not that young people don't have a voice, but mechanisms are not offered to them in an appealing way."*³

The Leicester City Young People's Council (YPC) and Young Consultants are participation and democracy projects run by Leicester City Youth Service. The Young People's Council comprises young, elected members, who represent the views of young people when engaging with senior decision-makers. Elected members of the YPC express opinions on issues that affect young people. Once elected, YPC representatives meet other young people from Leicester and listen to their constituents' needs and issues.

The YPC is THE group in Leicester with a mandate for youth participation. Its members are invited to work alongside members of Leicester City Council (LCC) on all major issues concerning young people's services. YPC representatives also sit on the children's scrutiny committee with members of the LCC. Here, they look at council decisions and hold councillors to account on all matters affecting young people.

Furthermore, they have seats on the police community gold stakeholder group, which discusses issues related to crime prevention, anti-social behaviour and policing.

² Ladder of participation. 2008, Adam Fletcher owns the copyright for this material on behalf of The Freechild Project. www.freechild.org

³ Stated at the RAN study visit to Leicester on 5-6 June 2018 by former member of Young People's Council

The YPC also carries out a number of other tasks:

1. working with the UK Youth Parliament on national campaigns;
2. helping to set the budget for youth services;
3. offering advice on changes to youth services.

For every role that a YPC representative takes on, he or she receives full training.

Measures are also in place to help the municipality engage with hard-to-reach and/or vulnerable groups of young people. The YPC has co-opted members representing children in care, gypsies and travellers, young people with special educational needs and disabilities, young carers, and young people attending specialist services.

The YPC is an excellent example of how to engage young people in actual decision-making processes. And an entity such as the YPC makes it possible to implement all of the 10 standards of involvement whilst following a local approach.

Reclaim Radical: providing safe space for discussion

“Why is there so much fear around the word ‘radical’? Opening up and having discussions is the key starting point. They can open up loads of channels.”⁴

When the ‘Prevent Duty’ was introduced in the UK, it put a legal obligation on schools to show due regard to issues of radicalisation and other social harms. The Leicester initiative ‘Reclaim Radical’ was designed by the YPC to support first-line practitioners as they explore new ways to involve young people in the Prevent agenda. The idea behind Reclaim Radical is that young people start

to shape their own world view as they progress through adolescence, and need a safe place to explore their ideas. They also need to continue being challenged by the adults in their lives.

However, Leicester as elsewhere, teachers have sometimes struggled to have open and honest dialogues with students, and how to deal with controversial opinions. The transition from adolescence to adulthood is generally the time when young people formulate their understanding of the world and their place within that. Some young people become politicised in ways that can be seen as challenging and oppositional.

Young people in Leicester underlined how they felt that the professionals they had worked with were not equipped with the skills and confidence to talk to young people about the prevent agenda, and that in-depth debates were being shut down. Reclaim Radical states that professionals should embrace young people being radical. The initiative provides a safe place for young people to be challenged, and safeguards them from going elsewhere for information, which may eventually lead to increased vulnerability to grooming.

Reclaim Radical is designed around three short films, all created and filmed by local young people in Leicester. The films are designed to allow professionals to ascertain the knowledge base of young people. But they also come with a toolkit of youth-proofed national resources for teaching staff to create bespoke programmes around radicalisation.

Links to the three videos:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IKUaAWSeunY&list=PL4_r-tLAparSiBldt0tY7D298hC2bQow

⁴Stated at the RAN study visit to Leicester on 5-6 June 2018 by former member of Young People’s Council

A second project, ‘How will you hear me’, is a series of short films depicting young people’s experiences of being heard (or not) by different services. Young people from both the Young People’s Council and Young Advisors worked on the project. For a detailed description, see annexe 2 of this paper.

The Leicester Young Consultants – activities in the public and private realm

“During my whole time as a member, it has helped my personal development and I gained so much experience. The posh buildings... someone like me would not have access to them, so this made a huge personal impact.”⁵

Leicester Young Consultants is a consultancy company, led by young people aged 15 to 25. The consultants serve businesses, local authorities, and non-profit organisations that want to improve the services they offer young people. Their aim is to help their clients make long-term advances and reach their key objectives. With an award-winning team of more than 30 nationally trained consultants, the company is able to provide unique insights and advice to both private and public sector clients. Assignments can include research and insight, youth-proofing, mystery shopping, youth marketing and facilitation, and involvement in commissioning panels for youth services and public health.

Whereas the Young Consultants do not have the direct link with P/CVE strategies, the initiative is very successful in engaging young people; this can feed into initiatives to prevent radicalisation. The initiative also supports the active involvement of

young people in local companies and politics, allows them to receive training and remuneration for their consultancy work, and provides a platform for young people, including vulnerable children, to have their voice heard.

The impact of involving young people is clear: it leaves less room for feeling excluded and not listened to – two sentiments that can play a part in radicalisation processes.

What do young people need from the local authorities?

- Trust in young people
- Investment in relationship-building
- Involvement in decision-making
- Clear infrastructure, including a place where young people can pitch their ideas

What do local authorities need from young people?

- Trust in local authorities
- A sense of responsibility
- Intrinsic motivation
- Proposals for solutions to problems identified
- Knowledge about the local system and awareness that the decision-making process takes time

Conclusions

To organise youth participation at a local level, certain facilities and infrastructures must be established. In Leicester the Young People’s Council is an instrument through which young people can influence decision-making processes

⁵ Stated at the RAN study visit to Leicester on 5-6 June 2018 by a Young Consultant

and develop their own projects. Without these structures, successful youth participation is not possible. When the basic structure is there, the 10 standards of involvement should be included in the youth participation strategy.

Final considerations for successful youth participation

- Never underestimate the power of trust and respect
- Disclosure is not the same as talking
- Listening is an active process
- Consistency of personnel and quality is important
- Strategies and policies should have clear definitions of participation.
- Give young people the right to participate in decision-making.

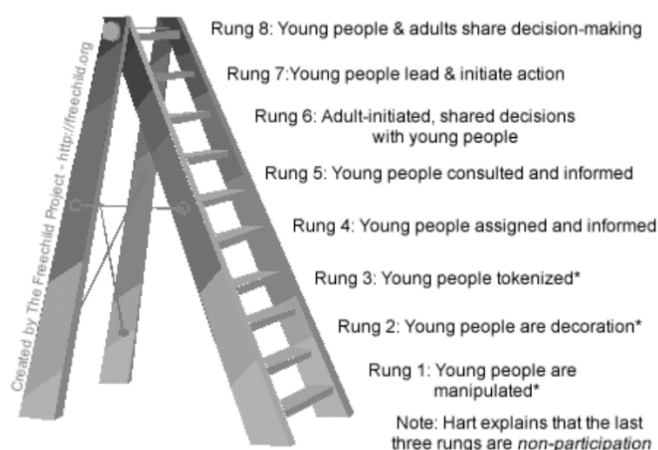
Bibliography

- Gill, P. (2018, June 25). *Seven Findings on Lone Actor Terrorism*. Retrieved from International Centre for the Study of Terrorism (ICST): <http://sites.psu.edu/icst/2013/02/06/seven-findings-on-lone-actor-terrorists/>
- Hart, R. (1997). *The Ladder of Participation*. Retrieved from https://higherlogicdownload.s3.amazonaws.com/ASTC/00e37246-8bd9-481f-900c-ad9d6b6b3393/UploadedImages/Ladder_of_Participation_1.pdf
- Leicester City Council. (2018). *Prevent Duty*. Retrieved from <https://www.leicester.gov.uk/your-community/emergencies-safety-and-crime/crime-prevention/prevent-duty/>
- Leicester City Council. (n.d.). *Corporate Equality and Diversity Strategy 2018-2022*.
- Prevent, L. (2017). *LLR Prevent Steering Group Action Plan: 2017/18*. Retrieved from http://www.leicesterprevent.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/PSG-Action-Plan-website-version_Jun-2017.pdf
- The Children's Society. (n.d.). *What is subjective wellbeing?* Retrieved from <https://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/what-we-do/research/what-is-subjective-well-being>

Annexe I

Ladder of Participation

Roger Hart's Ladder of Young People's Participation



Adapted from Hart, R. (1992). *Children's Participation from Tokenism to Citizenship*. Florence: UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre.

About the Ladder

Sociologist Roger Hart wrote a book called **Children's Participation: The Theory And Practice Of Involving Young Citizens In Community Development And Environmental Care** for UNICEF in 1997. This ground-breaking work described young people and adults around the world as allies in the context of a global movement for participation, offering guidance and criticism of previous attempts at children's participation. The 'Ladder of Children's Participation', also called the 'Ladder of Youth Participation', is one of many significant tools to come out of the book.

Degrees of Participation

8) *Young people-initiated, shared decisions with adults*. This happens when projects or programmes are initiated by young people and decision-making is shared between young people and adults. These projects empower young people, while at the same time enabling them to access and learn from the life experience and

expertise of adults. **This rung of the ladder can be embodied by youth/adult partnerships.**

7) *Young people-initiated and directed*. This is when young people initiate and direct a project or programme. Adults are involved only in a supportive role. **This rung of the ladder can be embodied by youth-led activism.**

6) *Adult-initiated, shared decisions with young people*. Occurs when projects or programmes are initiated by adults but the decision-making is shared with the young people. **This rung of the ladder can be embodied by participatory research.**

5) *Consulted and informed*. Happens when young people give advice on projects or programmes designed and run by adults. The young people are informed about how their input will be used and the outcomes of the decisions made by adults. **This rung of the ladder can be embodied by youth advisory councils.**

4) *Assigned but informed*. This is where young people are assigned a specific role and informed about how and why they are being involved. **This rung of the ladder can be embodied by community youth boards.**

3) *Tokenism*. When young people appear to be given a voice, but in fact have little or no choice about what they do or how they participate. **This rung of the ladder reflects adultism.**

2) *Decoration*. Happens when young people are used to help or 'bolster' a cause in a relatively indirect way, although adults do not pretend that the cause is inspired by young people. **This rung of the ladder reflects adultism.**

1) *Manipulation*. Happens where adults use young people to support causes and pretend that the causes are inspired by young people. **This rung of the ladder reflects adultism.**

The 7/8 Debate

Roger Hart's Ladder of Participation shows young people-initiated, shared decisions with adults at the top rung for young people's participation,

followed immediately by young people-initiated and directed. This can be controversial for many people working with and around young people. Essentially, the debate is over which of these levels of participation is the most meaningful. Many believe that shared decision-making is most beneficial to both young people and adults. Others believe that young people are most empowered when they are making decisions without the influence of adults. Often, this doesn't exclude adults, but reduces their role to that of support. Both arguments have merit; ultimately, it is up to each group to determine which form of decision-making best fits with the groups' needs.

Annexe 2

How will you hear me: attention for the most vulnerable

“I have lived in children’s homes my whole life, but I got the chance to learn more about politics and the institutions. More of the vulnerable should be heard and get these chances, because they show more risky behaviour and can be a danger to themselves.”

This project comprises a series of films depicting people’s experiences of being heard (or not) by different services. Young people from both the Young People’s Council and the Young Advisors worked on the project. The powerful stories are the everyday experiences of young people. They could be young people in any city, any town.

The videos are designed to encourage open and honest debate amongst staff, to motivate them and develop their confidence to intervene in the development of participation practice and policy within their organisation. The approach taken for this training resource acknowledges participation as rights-based.

The film showcases the ownership young people feel towards facilities they use: “This is my youth club, I don’t mean that I own it, or even run it, but it is MY youth club.” It shows us that buildings are more than bricks and mortar, for young people they become safe places, sometimes a second home.

The videos have challenged professionals to explore the professional ‘intimacy’ of the work they do, working with young people and their families who are sometimes at their most vulnerable. This requires a skilled, emotionally literate workforce who can empower the families they work with through building relationships based on mutual respect and trust.

This initiative by young people supports cooperation between the families, other young people and staff, which can of course be applied in the P/CVE domain as well. Brahmpreet Gulati tells us young people have to be actively involved in decisions that affect services they attend. The reality is more often than not that decisions are made without young people, so dialogue is uneven, and participation becomes devalued as a result.

Link to videos:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QNN5co1Zb_8&list=PL36lj8AN28RbGse8ZKZyXy4RR1dFR72b4