



Developing Your Own Panel with Autistic Young People



Autistic
Young
Experts



Autism
Education
Trust



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As a demographic, autistic young people are some of the most excluded from education, the workplace and society as a whole.

There are 132,345 autistic young people at state primary, secondary and special schools in England. The latest figures from the Department for Education (DfE) show autistic pupils in England as being twice as likely to be excluded from school for a fixed period as pupils with no special educational needs. Fewer than one in four autistic people access education beyond compulsory school age and only 16% of autistic adults are currently in full-time employment. Autistic young people's voices are routinely ignored, and they are regularly patronised by people who do not understand autism, support needs or reasonable adjustments. This leads to isolation, poor mental health and unmet potential.

Setting up a pupil, learner or local panel is one way that you can provide the space for autistic young people to have their voices heard on the decisions that matter to them. This isn't just a "nice to have" but is rooted in legislation, with Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) saying that children and young people should have a say in decisions that affect their lives.

It also supports the Ofsted requirement of pupil voice, with autistic young people providing "insight into the student experience and the education system" that no neurotypical (non-autistic) person would be able to replicate.¹ By engaging with autistic young people, your educational setting or local area could provide support and services that are authentic, useful and ensure young people are receiving the right support at the right time.

¹ Quote from Autistic Young Experts Panel member.

The guide covers an introduction to participation and provides advice on how you can successfully engage with autistic young people through a lived experience panel. Resources are referenced throughout the guide and feature in the appendices, as well as points for reflection and a glossary of key terms. It aims to be relevant for schools, colleges, other educational settings and local authorities who are looking to involve autistic young people in their work.

The Autism Education Trust (AET) decided to create the guide as we have benefitted so greatly from our Autistic Young Experts Panel since 2016. The Panel add their voice and life experience to AET projects, input on strategy and guide the organisation on how to support autistic young people in the ways they need. You will hear from them throughout the guide, as well as advice from the panel facilitator on their experience and expertise.

“It is important to remember that the experience of being autistic is different for every autistic person. There’s no one singular image or description that an autistic person could meet and every individual could match. Every autistic person is unique.”

Autistic Young Expert

Participation and engagement are just two of the many words that are used to describe involving people in the decisions that concern them or in projects that focus on them. In educational settings it is quite often called student or pupil voice.

Within participation and engagement, you will also see the term co-production. To us co-production is working together in an equal and balanced partnership that creates outcomes that benefit everyone involved.

Alongside these terms you will also find there are different theories, or models, of participation, some of which we explain in the glossary and build on in the Facilitating the panel section. Models can be helpful for you to see where you are sitting in terms of young people gaining meaningful opportunities to have their voices heard but they are not a prescriptive or exhaustive list.

There is lots of discussion about how to do participation, engagement or co-production authentically, successfully and ethically. The key point when thinking about participation and engagement with any person or group is ensuring that you are doing it for the right reason and can keep the balance of power in check.



Point for reflection

Before you begin any participation or engagement project, ask yourself the following questions:

- Am I genuinely interested in hearing from this group of people?
- Am I able to act on the points and opinions they will share?
- Will there be a genuine balance of power?

If you cannot answer yes to the questions above, your panel or project will not be genuine participation but a token exercise.

It is also of the utmost importance to be explicit and transparent throughout a project or panel. If you are asking for someone to share their personal and lived experience, you must respect this by being open about where this information will go and what it will impact.



Point for reflection

Be honest with yourself about the challenges you may face in trying to set up and maintain your panel. List the barriers and then begin to work through how you can overcome them.

Barriers could include:

- A lack of senior level buy-in.
- A lack of consistent space to hold the panel.
- No budget.
- No staff.



Where are you on the journey? Where do you want to be?

Participation Levels

Autistic young people are involved in each part of a project or panel. They are leading on delivery and ideas, their views are listened to and acted upon, and they have equal input.

Autistic young people are listened to, are involved in decision making and starting to take the lead in their project or panel.

Autistic young people are listened to and are starting to be involved in some decision making.

Autistic young people are listened to but there is no guarantee their views will be acted on.

Autistic young people aren't consulted, involved or listened to.

“I like to help other people. I want to help make a difference to autistic people who may be getting discouragement from others to help show them that they can be successful.”

Autistic Young Expert

The benefits of setting up an autistic lived experience panel in your educational setting or local area cannot be understated.

The impact of a panel will always be two-fold: the impact on the autistic young people who are taking part and the impact on those outside of the panel – whether these are peers, professionals or the wider public.

Below is a list of benefits that a panel could bring:

- The opportunity for young people to be involved in planning events, services, campaigns.
- Gaining insight from lived experience and learning from the experts.
- Fresh perspectives on difficult or pervasive issues.
- Authentic, co-produced resources to support young people and staff.
- An educational setting or local area that understands and values difference.
- A friendship group with like-minded peers.
- Leadership and development opportunities – for example, teamwork, communication and critical thinking.
- Young people have a voice, feel respected and listened to.
- Improved communication and mutual respect between young people and professionals.
- Reducing the stigma around autism.
- Empowered young people who know their rights.

The list is, of course, not exhaustive.

Point for reflection

Before you begin the recruitment process for your panel, think about the following questions:

- Is there an appetite for your panel or project? Are there young people willing to be involved?
- Is everyone on board with your panel? For the panel to be successful, young people need to be able to draw on support from a range of professionals and also their peers.
- Is the value of a panel – or participation with young people in general – embedded in the organisation's practice and culture? Will their contributions be valued?
- Does the link staff member have a link to senior management? Can they genuinely make the changes the young people are asking to see?
- Do you have a place for your panel to meet? Will this be consistent and suitable for the sensory needs of the group?
- Do you have a budget that can be used on project resources? This covers both resources for the panel itself (paper, pens, printing, etc) but also resources that may be created as part of your panel's work (leaflets, posters, etc).
- Does there need to be training for the panel members and the staff facilitating? For example, on problem solving, communication skills, presentation skills, working as a team, improving confidence and self-esteem.
- What do you know – or think you know – about autistic young people already? For example, if your school has low attendance rates for autistic pupils, or they aren't getting the right reasonable adjustments, can you use this information as a starting point?
- Think about consultation fatigue. Have young people been asked to participate before but haven't had their views acted upon? How will this time be different?



Once you have thought about the previous point for reflection, you can start to think about how you will recruit autistic young people to your panel.

Below are some recruitment guidelines that can help you plan the process:

1. Identify a clear purpose before you recruit, so that young people know what they are getting involved in and can see the long-term goal.
 - The goal should be realistic and meaningful.
2. Be explicit at recruitment about the time this project will take, what is required of the young person and what they can expect in return.
 - Terms of reference for the panel will be helpful but they need to be accessible.
 - How long a period of time is a term on the panel? What happens if someone no longer wants to take part?
3. What are the incentives to getting involved in your panel?

Incentives could include:

 - Volunteering hours.
 - Extra credits or house points.
 - A reference for further education or work.
 - Accreditation through organisations like AQA or UK Youth.
 - Improving school for themselves and their peers.
 - Visible changes based on their work, proving their participation has made a difference.

4. How many young people can safely and successfully be on your panel?

If you don't have many people who want to take part, will you still be in a position to run your panel? If so, can you learn from this smaller group on how best to engage with a wider group?

5. Is your panel covering all year groups or age ranges?

How will you make sure it is suitable for young people at different points in their education?

6. Is the recruitment to the panel by application or by vote?

- If by application, emphasise that young people don't have to have any experience to join. Ask them about why they want to join and what their aims are but keep any form simple and accessible.
- If you have too many applications, how will you pick participants? Will the process be anonymous? Can the selection be random or do you need one person per class, year, local area, etc?
- If by vote, think about whether this may put some young people off applying as they may not have friends or peers to support them. Make sure the vote is about what the young person is aiming to do and is not a popularity contest. This isn't likely to be a method that supports autistic young people.
- If you are recruiting for a local area, have you checked whether there are local groups that already convene young people? Could you visit young people where they are instead of creating a new group?

7. If you have to reject applications due to over-subscription, make sure you provide positive feedback.

You could also think about how these interested young people could feed into the work of your panel. Can they be part of a wider group that shares their views but doesn't attend meetings? Do they get an automatic space next year if they are still interested?

Our terms of reference

The role of the Autistic Young Experts Panel (Young People's Panel) is to enable autistic young people to:

- Share their experience and views.
- Contribute their ideas to the AET's thinking, plans and projects.
- Take part in developing AET training.
- Contribute to evaluating the AET's impact.
- Empower other autistic young people to input to the AET.

Contribution

The Young People's Panel may be asked to contribute in the following ways:

Sharing their experiences, views and ideas

- Sharing their experiences of the challenges they face(d) in education.
- Sharing their views on what would make/has made a difference.
- Contributing their own insights and ideas about the AET's activities and plans.

Developing training

Working with the AET Director to:

- Evaluate existing AET training products.
- Develop new AET products.
- Encourage co-delivery of training with autistic young people.

Evaluating impact

Working with the AET Director in evaluating the difference the AET's training has made to autistic young people in education.

Empowering other autistic young people

Advising the AET Board and Director on how to engage with other autistic young people.

Working with the Director to gather information about:

- Their experience of education.
- Their priorities for improvement.

Membership

- The Young People's Panel will comprise up to 12 members.
- Panel members must be aged 16–25.
- Members of the Young People's Panel will be drawn from a variety of backgrounds and across a range of needs and educational settings.
- Panel members will be appointed by the AET Director and Young People's Panel Facilitator for a three-year term.
- Panel members may be reappointed for a further year provided that they remain under 25.
- All members of the Young People's Panel will be required to sign a volunteer agreement and support form, and agree to be subject to our safeguarding policy.



Meetings

- The Young People's Panel will meet at least once a month and may hold additional meetings if needed.
- The agenda and papers will be co-produced by the Director and Young People's Panel and circulated a week in advance of meetings.
- Meetings will take place online or face-to-face as appropriate.
- Brief notes of the meeting will be circulated a week after each meeting.

Information and support

- The AET Director will attend the meetings of the Young People's Panel to ensure that the Panel is kept informed about the AET's activities and seek their input as set out above.
- The Young People's Panel Facilitator will facilitate meetings and provide support to Panel members between meetings to enable them to contribute in the way that best meets their needs.

Attendance

- It is important that Panel members attend regularly and send their apologies if they are unable to attend.
- If a Panel member regularly misses meetings the Young People's Panel Facilitator will have a conversation about their role and how to support attendance going forward.

Links to AET Board and reporting arrangements

- An annual report on the Young People's Panel will be produced by the Director and Young People's Panel Facilitator with the Panel's input.
- A nominated member of the Board will provide a link to the AET Board and may attend Young People's Panel meetings. There will also be an opportunity for Young People's Panel members to meet informally with AET Board members at least once a year to discuss the work of the Young People's Panel.

 Appendix A – Example Terms of Reference

Above all, your recruitment needs to be attractive to autistic young people and make them want to apply for the opportunity.

Members of the Autistic Young Experts Panel told us why they wanted to join:

“To help and create resources and toolkits for schools to use to better inform teachers and education staff members about autism.”

“Things needed to change. And I felt as someone who was privileged enough to be very verbally articulate, I owed it to my community to try and be the change I wanted to see.”

“It was suggested by my SENCO that people could learn from my experience this panel could help me share my experience.”

“To be able to make a difference, and get schools and educational settings to learn, accept and understand their autistic pupils.”

“Because the current support available in my area was bad, I was very lucky to have a parent who was an autism expert and I STILL had an awful time so other people probably had it worse.”

Autistic Young Experts



Facilitating the panel



Once you have recruited autistic young people to your panel, you can start to think about how it should be facilitated. As each young person has their own unique support needs and experience to bring, each panel will have to be delivered in a way that centres and meets these requirements.

If you are running your panel in an educational setting, you should already have some knowledge of the young people, their support needs and which methods suit them best. However, don't forget to let the young people themselves control the narrative here – the way they are in class may be very different to how they will be in a group with like-minded peers. Give them the opportunity to share if they so wish.

“[A panel should be] a safe space to share your perspective, and to ask for questions – asking for more information should not be seen as combative, and everyone deserves space and time to be heard.”

Autistic Young Expert

Top tips

Our top tips on facilitating a panel:

- Create a respectful environment that encourages listening and sharing experiences through open and honest communication.
- Provide a clear structure that works for your panel for each meeting including objectives.
- Co-produce a long-term vision or goals for the panel.
- Provide opportunities for social bonding and building relationships.
- Deliver the panel with experienced and committed facilitators.
- Ensure that your panel is diverse and includes the experiences of a range of autistic young people within your setting.
- Amplify their voices outside of the panel for greater influence and change.

How to begin?

Before you have even begun running sessions, you can start giving young people the opportunity to make decisions within the boundaries you have set. Questions could include:

- Which room would they like the meetings to be delivered in?
- When should the meetings be and how long for?
- How often should the meetings be?
- What would be their preferred way of running the meetings? Led by staff, led by young people, formal or informal?
- Do they want young people to initiate and take the lead or is this a long-term goal?

Giving young people the opportunity to make decisions from the outset will start to shift the power dynamic between young people and professionals and make them feel listened to. It also means that the way your panel is delivered is much more likely to meet their needs and be successful.

“[A panel needs] facilitators who are... experienced in advocating alongside autistic people and respect their perspectives.”

Autistic Young Expert

Point for reflection

Are there barriers to running your panel that you need to consider? For example:

- Does having a panel outside of school hours exclude young people who may have extra responsibilities such as caring?
- Does having face-to-face meetings put pressure on young people who aren't confident in talking in front of others?
- How do you keep momentum going with your panel and its projects?



Top tips

To have an effective and productive panel, it is important that your panel meetings are well organised and facilitated. Great facilitation can lead to great participation and will allow you to tune into the strengths of each individual member of your panel.

We would recommend that to keep momentum going, your panel should meet regularly and have a clear outline of objectives they wish to meet.

When facilitating the Autistic Young Experts Panel, we found that regular meetings – now once a month – allowed the panel members to keep a sense of momentum between meetings and allowed them to stay engaged in the projects they were working on. We found that leaving large gaps between meetings – months at a time – meant that the busy panel members struggled to remain engaged with the work of the panel and found it difficult to keep in contact between meetings.

By reevaluating the meeting schedule, we now have a fully engaged and committed panel who we can support and who support each other in and outside of meetings.

Rules of engagement

A further way of deciding how your panel can be run is through co-producing the “rules of engagement” or a “group constitution”. This can be done through a suggestions box, with young people putting their ideas in anonymously or in an interactive session where they write their ideas on Post-It notes and stick them on a board. From there, you can vote with stickers on the suggestions that will make the final rules. At the start of each session or meeting the rules should be read out or referred to.

Rules of engagement could also cover any specific roles on the panel such as a chair, treasurer or secretary. These extra roles can sometimes be helpful in providing young people a clear outline of what their responsibilities are and give them the opportunity to either work to their skills or develop new ones.

Building rapport

Building a group dynamic is one of the most important parts of facilitating a panel. If you are bringing together young people from different year groups it may take a while to build rapport and for the young people to feel comfortable discussing their thoughts.

Equally, sometimes autistic people feel that they must mask (hide parts of themselves in an attempt to better “fit in”) and they especially may feel under pressure in meetings. What you see may not always be representative of what they are feeling so never assume.

Ways to build rapport could include:

- Filling in one page profiles before the first meeting so young people can learn about their peers. These profiles could include communication preferences, special interests or why they wanted to be part of the panel.
- At the minimum, share a list of photos of the members of the panel so they can put faces to names.
- Run an induction meeting before the work of the panel begins. This session should just focus on getting to know one another. Although this session will be informal it should still have an agenda so that young people know what to expect. If they are going to have to answer questions, provide these in advance so they can prepare.

Rapport building will also extend to the staff members running or supporting your panel. Young people may not want to be truthful about their experiences in the educational setting in case of repercussions. They may be fearful that anything they do share about their experiences will be used against them or have a real lack of trust with professionals if they have been previously let down by the system. If there is an opportunity for young people to choose the staff member, this could allay fears about working with staff members who have previously misunderstood them.

If it is not possible for the young people to pick the staff member, then the staff member should make extra effort in building rapport and reassuring the young people this is a safe space. This could come through sharing their reasons for being part of the panel, what they are hoping to learn, a one page profile or committing to the rules of engagement of the group. For more tips, head to the Supporting staff to run the panel section.



What is the aim of the panel?

You will know why you wanted to recruit a panel, but you can now focus more specifically on what the aim of your panel is and what the young people will be working on.

- Be honest about what can be achieved. Outline the project boundaries and limitations at the start, whether these are to do with time, money or sign-off.
 - Will the panel get to co-produce anything tangible? Or are they simply advisory?
 - Will they be afforded sufficient resources in order to allow ongoing meaningful participation?
 - Will they be able to share what they are doing with senior management or governors?
- Make sure that the aim is young people friendly. For example, commissioning, governance and strategy can be confusing concepts. Break down what it is that you are hoping to achieve.
- Explain how your panel fits into wider frameworks. Does it link to Ofsted pupil voice? Does it tick a box regarding engaging with young people?
- How do you want to start the work? Is it on an initial campaign or project that has already been decided on? Or is the focus on building the group, building relationships and choosing the campaigns they want to work on?
 - One way of setting a plan for your panel is to use the answers young people gave in their applications about what they wanted to achieve or why they wanted to be a part of it.
 - You could also aim towards a key date such as an awareness week, assembly or event.

Capturing voices from outside the panel

Not all autistic young people will want to be on your panel, but this doesn't mean they shouldn't be able to input and have their voices heard.

Once you have built your group rapport, written your rules of engagement and decided on the aim of your panel, you can start to think about capturing the views of a wider group of people.

Ways to achieve this could be:

- A suggestions or submissions box before the meetings where young people could submit topics or issues for discussion. This could be anonymous if the young person wished.
- Using events or assemblies to reach a wider audience and ask for feedback on any resources or plans the panel has been working on.
- If a young person is regularly not at school, can they be contacted for their input via staff? They could be sent worksheets or suggestions slips to fill in.



Top tips

Our top tips for inclusive facilitation:

- Use clear and simple language.
- Make sure all resources you provide are visual or Easy Read when needed.
- Don't overload young people in meetings. Write down every verbal question that is asked to allow processing time.
- Follow up any discussions in writing or provide minutes of what happened.
- Create plans for meetings and stick to them.
- Give worksheets in advance so that young people can prepare their answers.
- Give as much notice as possible when changes are going to happen.
- Create a safe space where young people know they can be their whole selves.
- Make use of support forms and don't ever assume.
- Understand that capabilities of autistic young people can vary from day-to-day and hour-to-hour.
- Act professionally and respectfully. Don't patronise the young people or act as their guardian.
- Check-in regularly and ask for feedback on how the sessions could be improved.
- Be humble and actively listen.

Top tips

Having a clear structure and aims for your meetings will support young people to participate to the fullest.

Knowing what will be discussed ahead of time will allow the panel members to have time to think about the topics before the meeting and give them the opportunity to begin to formulate their ideas. This can lead to deeper discussions and allow your panel to feel more informed and empowered to contribute during the panel meeting.

Before the meeting

- Create an agenda and worksheets for each meeting.

These should be in a simple or Easy Read format and circulated at least one week before the meeting. This allows the young people the opportunity to review these before the meeting and formulate any questions or responses they would want to bring to the meeting.

Each person on your panel is a unique individual. By asking them how they would like to access this information, its appearance and frequency will be dependent on what the panel prefer.

- Flexibility and adjustments should be included and always considered to best support the panel members in taking part.
- Let the panel members know who will be leading and supporting in sessions, providing one page profiles where possible. This helps to create a supportive environment where your panel will feel confident to participate.
- Meetings should be held in a safe sensory environment where the panel feels comfortable.
- Encourage and give opportunities for collaboration and group work if this works for your panel members. This could include group discussions or breaking into small working groups who present back at the end of the session.

During the meeting

- At the start of your first meeting, work with your panel to create a group agreement. This will ensure the group understand what is expected of them during meetings. This also allows for a better and more integrated group.
- Allow an element of flexibility with the agenda that works for your group of young people. You may want to explore ideas that arise in more depth or stick to the schedule; it is your decision as you know your group best.
- Ensure your young people can communicate in ways that work for them. Do not put pressure on young people to contribute verbally during the meeting as this may be overwhelming. Written and other alternative communication methods should be encouraged.
- Give all panel members the opportunity to contribute during the meeting, but do not force this if some members are not confident.

“...a good balance between discussion and breaks to help with processing.”

Autistic Young Expert

Following the meeting

- Ask your participants to evaluate how the meeting went.

This feedback could be provided verbally or in writing. Use this feedback to inform your next meeting. For example, “please share one positive from today’s meeting” or “what one thing would you change about the meeting to make it better next time?”

- Compile a brief summary of what was covered in the meeting and circulate to the panel members. Include any action points the panel need to work on outside of the meeting.
- Plan your next meeting, building on the work that has just been completed.
- Ensure your panel members see development and progress towards the aims you have laid out for the panel. Consider involving the panel in co-creating future agendas and meeting summaries.
- Ensure you follow up with those who were not able to attend and keep them up to date with the work of the panel.

 [Appendix C – Example Session Plan](#)

 [Appendix D – Example Agenda](#)

 [Appendix E – Example Summary Sheet](#)

 [Appendix F – Example Support Form](#)

Running a lived experience panel can be a great opportunity for people to meet like-minded peers who understand what they have gone through. However, everyone is at a different point in their journey and sometimes sharing your experiences can upset or trigger others.

If you are delivering a panel within an educational setting, you will have a lengthy safeguarding policy about how to protect young people. Within your panel, however, it would be helpful to think further about how it can be facilitated in a way that allows young people to share but not to upset others.

Ways to do this could include:

- Having a point in the rules of engagement about how to warn people of what you are about to share. For example, if you are about to share a story that may upset others, please begin by being explicit about this. This gives other young people the opportunity to leave if needs be.
- Setting up boundaries about what can be shared and what can't. This should be linked to the aim of your panel. For example, all discussions within sessions should be focused on improvements in understanding of autism rather than an open forum.
- Making use of the support forms that you have for young people. This should outline behaviours to look out for and what to do in the case of meltdowns, shutdowns or distressed behaviour.
- Ensuring that you have strong links to pastoral support within the setting or external support if required.
- Having enough staff on the panel to allow a young person to be supported and also for the meeting to continue. You may have policies about what is considered a safe ratio.

Top tips

What we consider to be key to a successful panel:

The leader having a willingness to learn and have their perceptions of autism changed.

That the panel is first and foremost led by the ideas of the young people.

Remembering that every single person is an individual. It is a spectrum for a reason, and you will have to learn with the panel.

Not speaking on behalf of everyone with autism – we are all unique, despite sharing similar traits!

Point for reflection

At the start of the guide, we made reference to the high numbers of autistic young people who are excluded from school and the isolation that people face. This means that it is likely when you ask autistic young people about their experiences of education, they will have some difficult stories to share.

When thinking about these experiences and maintaining a positive group dynamic, ask yourself the following questions:

- How do we recognise the emotional labour of the young people sharing their experiences to improve things for others?
- What makes the panel a genuinely safe space?
- What is the balance between having a safe staff ratio but not having too many adults?
- How does the balance change between an educational setting and a local setting?



Although your lived experience panel may get to a point where it is led by young people and more self-sustaining, it is likely that it will always begin with professional support. Running a panel like this is a large task that will have consistent draws on time if it is to be successful and meaningful.

Senior management and/or governors must make sure that staff are equipped for this extra work with both time, resources and knowledge. This could be a small budget for resources, training around facilitation and accreditation or senior support that allows them to make decisions and enact change.

As well as rules of engagement, the panel could help develop a staff pledge. An example could be:

In supporting the panel, I promise to:

- Treat young people as individuals.
- Create an open, safe and respectful space.
- Adapt my approach depending on people's needs that day or hour.
- Understand and believe that autism is difference not deficit.
- Empower young people to speak out – not speak over them or for them.
- Never assume I know what the solution is.
- Liaise with senior management to enact the changes young people have asked for.

For further ideas on staff pledges or promises, read through the Inclusion Promises created by our Autistic Young Experts for educational staff.

We promise to:

- 1 Understand what you are good at, what you like doing, and when you might need help.
- 2 Listen to and act upon your ideas about how we can help you if you need it.
- 3 Listen to and work with the people who know you best and who you trust.
- 4 Make sure we are always progressing towards your goals and aspirations.
- 5 Make sure all staff know the best way to support you, both in and out of lessons.
- 6 Help you to get involved and be included in the activities you wish to participate in.
- 7 Work together to set achievable goals that are important to you, and that help you see how well you are doing.
- 8 Help you to feel safe, secure, empowered, and able to learn.

As well as getting initial buy-in to run a lived experience panel, professionals and young people may need to provide evidence that shows the impact of the panel and why it should continue. This could be for senior management, governors or funders.

This impact should not only be on the members of the panel itself but extend to outside your panel through the wider setting community and staff.

Ways to demonstrate impact include:

- Keeping records of the meetings through minutes and agendas to show what has been achieved. This is important if you have to deliver a certain number of meetings.
- Running quick and regular evaluations at the end of each meeting. This could be through a suggestions box or asking the same question each week. Any improvements suggested by the young people to be acted on as soon as possible.
- Demonstrating accountability by using “you said, we did” boards around the setting.
- Measuring the impact on the young people by asking questions at the start and end of the panel such as:
 - How has being on the panel been for them?
 - Has it changed their feelings towards school/peers/schoolwork?
 - Has it improved their confidence or self-esteem?
 - Have they learnt any new skills?
 - Has it reduced absences?

What is the impact of the panel?

- Evaluating any work your panel has produced. For example, has their campaign raised awareness? Is there any change in class dynamic? Is the wider pupil cohort reporting an increase in understanding?
- Utilising wellbeing measures that link to Ofsted or other setting initiatives to feed into a wider evaluation.
- Creating a visual report or delivering a presentation to other young people, professionals, senior management or governors.
- Creating a framework for delivery that could work for panels with other lived experience as the focus.

Always remember that your panel is a platform to amplify the authentic voices of autistic young people and you must be open to learning from them and the experiences they bring.



Co-production

Working together in an equal and balanced partnership that creates outcomes that benefit everyone involved.

Hart's ladder of participation

Eight levels of control, power and decision-making capabilities that can be given to children and young people by adults.

Lived experience

Having knowledge or understanding of something based on first-hand involvement. In this context, the young people have lived experience of being autistic.

Lundy's model of participation

A model that conceptualises a child or young person's right to participate. It covers four areas: space, voice, audience and influence.

Participation

In this context, providing the opportunity for young people to have their say in the decisions that affect them.

Pupil, learner or student voice

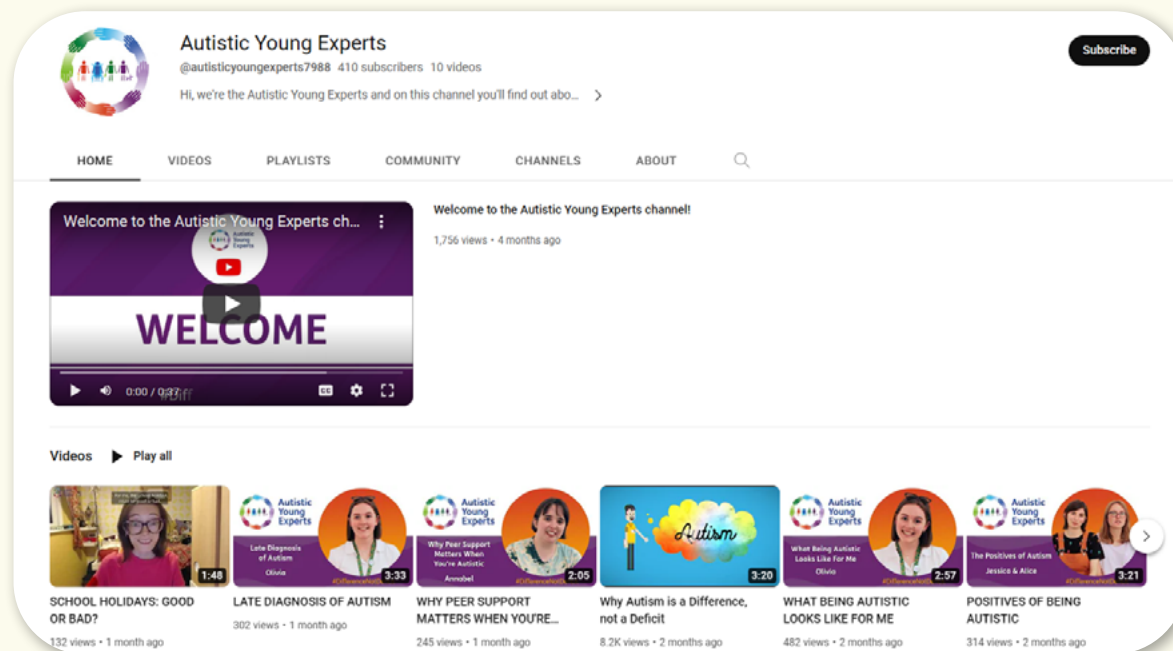
The opportunity for young people to share their experiences and opinions regarding their education.



The Autistic Young Experts Panel terms of reference included in the guide have been developed between panel members and facilitators.

[The terms of reference are accessible on the AET website in an area dedicated to the work of the Autistic Young Experts](#), which also provides more information on current projects and events.

In addition to written content, the Autistic Young Experts create audio and visual content explaining what the panel does, experiences of being autistic and why autism is a difference not a deficit. [Please take a look at our YouTube channel to find out more!](#)



The screenshot shows the YouTube channel page for 'Autistic Young Experts'. The channel name is 'Autistic Young Experts' with the handle '@autisticyoungexperts7988', 410 subscribers, and 10 videos. A 'Subscribe' button is visible. The channel description reads: 'Hi, we're the Autistic Young Experts and on this channel you'll find out abo...'. The navigation menu includes HOME, VIDEOS, PLAYLISTS, COMMUNITY, CHANNELS, and ABOUT. A video player is embedded, showing a 'WELCOME' video with 1,756 views from 4 months ago. Below the player, a 'Videos' section lists several videos:

Video Title	Duration	Views	Posted
SCHOOL HOLIDAYS: GOOD OR BAD?	1:48	132 views	1 month ago
LATE DIAGNOSIS OF AUTISM	3:33	302 views	1 month ago
WHY PEER SUPPORT MATTERS WHEN YOU'RE AUTISTIC	2:05	245 views	1 month ago
Why Autism is a Difference, not a Deficit	3:20	8.2K views	2 months ago
WHAT BEING AUTISTIC LOOKS LIKE FOR ME	2:57	482 views	2 months ago
POSITIVES OF BEING AUTISTIC	3:21	314 views	2 months ago

This **brand-new YouTube channel** has been created for the Panel's autistic and non-autistic peers and aims to increase awareness of autism by sharing **first-hand, lived experiences**.

The videos promise to be **entertaining, informative, and poignant** in parts, and the group hopes they'll help to create a **more accepting and inclusive society**.

Panel member Annabel explains:

"Hopefully, someone will come across the videos and understand autism a bit better. As an autistic person, I have a presentation of autism that ought to be included in societal perceptions too".

Ollie is also keen to create videos that promote a better understanding of autism:

"I wanted to share my experiences to stop people telling me I don't look autistic! But seriously, autistic women are under-represented in media, and this seemed like a great chance to change that".

Our top tips for inclusive facilitation on a poster for you to display and to share!

- Use clear and simple language.
- Make sure all resources you provide are visual or Easy Read when needed.
- Don't overload young people in meetings. Write down every verbal question that is asked to allow processing time.
- Follow up any discussions in writing or provide minutes of what happened.
- Create plans for meetings and stick to them.
- Give worksheets in advance so that young people can prepare their answers.
- Give as much notice as possible when changes are going to happen.
- Create a safe space where young people know they can be their whole selves.
- Make use of support forms and don't ever assume.
- Understand that capabilities of autistic young people can vary from day-to-day and hour-to-hour.
- Act professionally and respectfully. Don't patronise the young people or act as their guardian.
- Check-in regularly and ask for feedback on how the sessions could be improved.

Top Tips for Inclusive Facilitation

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Act professionally and respectfully. Don't patronise the young people or act as their guardian.

Check-in regularly and ask for feedback on how the sessions could be improved.

Name of workshop/project:

Date and time: This session plan is timed to 90 minutes with a break. You can, of course, adapt this to suit your group's needs.

Location details:




Facilitator:




Support staff:




Objectives of this meeting:

- To...
- To...
- To...

Structure: How will you structure the meeting? Based on the needs of your group you could have group discussions, work in pairs, utilise mind maps or online whiteboards, etc.

Timings	Item	Activity and details	Who?	Considerations
5 minutes	 Rules of engagement and support	Remind the group of the rules of engagement and the support available throughout sessions.	Person(s) responsible for the item.	Use these spaces to write out any considerations related to the item. For example: What support can you offer? Breakout rooms, safe or quiet spaces, using communication cards, regular check-ins.
5 minutes	 Introduction	For example: Everyone will introduce themselves: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Name. 2. Pronouns. 3. Icebreaker question. 		For example: If this doesn't work, I will... Give panel members options to share their introductions – verbal, written, communication cards.
5 minutes	 Agenda	Talk through the agenda. What are the objectives or priorities today?		For example: If a virtual group, consider pasting the agenda in the chat so everyone can see.

Timings	Item	Activity and details	Who?	Considerations
5 minutes	 Last meeting recap	Use the meeting summary sheet to recap the last meeting.		<p>For example: If a virtual group, share the meeting summary in advance.</p> <p>If an in-person group, hand out the meeting summary for people to look at.</p>
25 minutes	 Agenda point 1	[Agenda point 1]		
10 minutes	 BREAK			<p>For example: If a virtual group, encourage cameras and microphones off.</p> <p>If an in-person group, suggest a movement break.</p>

Timings	Item	Activity and details	Who?	Considerations
25 minutes	 Agenda point 2	[Agenda point 2]		
5 minutes	 Feedback	<p>Getting feedback from the group.</p> <p>For example:</p> <p>Please share one positive from today's meeting.</p> <p>What one thing would you change about the meeting to make it better next time?</p>		<p>For example: If a virtual group, make use of the poll function to ask for feedback.</p> <p>If an in-person group, you could do a show of hands, ask for written anonymous feedback or have an open discussion.</p>
5 minutes	 Next steps and check out	<p>For example:</p> <p>Next steps:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • [What you will do in the next session] • [What tasks they need to do before the next meeting] Optional. • [When you will send the summary sheet] • [When the next meeting is] <p>Check out and say goodbyes.</p>		





Tasks to be completed before the next meeting: *Optional.*





The session will be from: **Time to Time**

The session will take place: **Location details**

The session will be run by: **Person(s) responsible**

Where possible, include photos of the people running the session.

Timings	Item	Details
5 minutes/the time of day	 Rules of engagement and support	
5 minutes	 Introduction	<p>For example:</p> <p>Everyone will introduce themselves:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Name. • Pronouns. • Icebreaker question. Include this in your agenda so there is time to prepare an answer.

Timings	Item	Details
5 minutes	 Agenda	<p>For example:</p> <p>We will talk through this agenda and the plan for today's session.</p>
5 minutes	 Last meeting recap	<p>For example:</p> <p>We will go through the meeting summary sheet.</p> <p>You should have already received this via email/in-person.</p>
25 minutes	 Agenda point 1	<p>For example:</p> <p>We will be working on [Agenda point 1].</p> <p>We will do this by... Give advance notice of group work or other ways of working.</p>
10 minutes	 BREAK	

Timings	Item	Details
25 minutes	 Agenda point 2	<p>For example:</p> <p>We will be working on [Agenda point 2].</p> <p>We will do this by... Give advance notice of group work or other ways of working.</p>
5 minutes	 Feedback	<p>For example:</p> <p>We will ask for your feedback on today's session by...</p>
5 minutes	 Next steps and check out	<p>For example:</p> <p>We will talk about:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What you will do in the next session. • What actions or tasks you need to do before the next meeting. • When you will get the summary sheet for this meeting. • When the next meeting is.

Tips for your summary sheet:

- Keep sentences short and simple.
- Only include the most important bits of information.
- Put people's names next to tasks so it is clear who is doing what.

<p>Where appropriate, include a visual here</p>	<p>For example:</p> <p>Agenda point 1: Autism awareness campaign.</p> <p>What we discussed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• A campaign to increase autism awareness.• We discussed our plans and then voted.• The options were a video, a poster or a newsletter.• We have decided to make a video. <p>What the next steps are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Write a script for the video.• Decide who will appear in the video.• Film the video. <p>What actions or tasks you need to do:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• EVERYONE: Respond to the poll asking what role you want in the video campaign by [date].
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Where appropriate,
include a visual here

Agenda point 2: [Description]

What we discussed:

[Summary of Agenda point 2 discussion]

What the next steps are:

[Summary list of agreed next steps]

What actions or tasks you need to do:

[Summary lists of actions noting person(s) responsible]

Continue with summaries for any further agenda items.



My Support Needs To be completed by or with your panel members.

My name:

My age:

My differences:

Where I need support	What support has worked in the past	How can we recognise you need support
Communication	For example: Written communication before the meeting.	For example: I may not engage with the information about the meeting.
Social interaction	For example: Use communication cards to communicate my needs so I do not need to speak.	For example: I may avoid attending meetings.
Sensory differences	For example: Wearing ear defenders, using sensory toys.	For example: I may become disengaged or irritated.
Further entries as needed.	Further entries as needed.	Further entries as needed.

Adjustments I may need during meetings or events (select all you require):

Transcription or written communication.	
Regular breaks.	X
Easy Read materials/worksheets.	
An interpreter.	
Other (please give examples of other adjustments you find helpful).	X
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Size 16 font.• Coloured paper or overlay.	



The Autistic Young Experts and the Autism Education Trust would like to express their gratitude to the pupils at The Rise School for their contributions and support in developing the toolkit.

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